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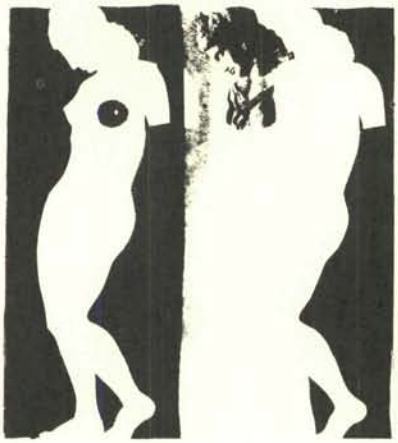

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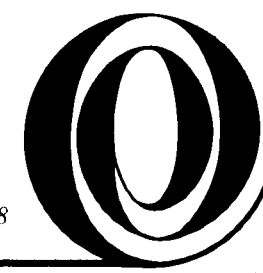

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Out of My Mind

A Cosmic Flow

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

Not long ago I was invited to dinner to meet a young artist who, I was told, had recently developed a strong interest in physics, especially in the physics of elementary particles—my own field of research. Ever eager to bridge the yawning crevasse that, it appears, separates the two cultures—coupled with the prospect of an excellent meal—I accepted at once. Upon my arrival, it turned out that the young man in question was accompanied by an attractive girlfriend and that she too had a burgeoning interest in the physics of elementary particles. This intriguing concidence, it developed, did not have its origin in any of the more recent discoveries in our discipline, but rather in a book they had read that, according to them, demonstrated that elementary particle physics provided a scientific basis for many of the revelations of Eastern mysticism. Could I, they wondered, enlighten them further on this remarkable development?

Their faces, however, fell to half-mast when I confessed that (a) I had never heard of the source of their inspiration—one Fritjof Capra—and that (b) I had not read his chef d'oeuvre, *The Tao of Physics*, which, they assured me, was the book in which this reconciliation was detailed.

They were further discomfited when I remarked that for the sake of Eastern mystic philosophy I hoped it wasn't true. In fact, I added, if I were a Tibetan monk or the swami in an ashram in New Delhi and if Fritjof Capra or anyone else came to my door clutching the latest copy of the *Physical Review Letters*—our rapid publication journal—and told me that X's gauge theory or Y's neutrino experiment forged the missing link between Western science and, say, the *Tao-te-ching* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, my reaction would be to gather up my belongings and head for the hills. Having watched for a number of years how these things go, the first thought that would cross my mind would be that the *following* week's journal might well bring the news that Y's graduate student, who had had the night shift on the accelerator that week, had fallen asleep at a crucial moment and had then, upon awakening, misread the numbers on several counters, or that X's four-year-old son had dropped X's pocket computer on the floor with the result that it now set $\pi = 2.5$, so that X and Y were both hopelessly in error—with the corollary that all of Eastern mystic thought had now been shown to be definitely wrong, scientifically speaking. In short, if I were an Eastern mystic the last thing in the world that I would want would be a reconciliation with modern science.

As I told my young friends, I found the prospect so distressing that I planned to look into the matter as rapidly as possible, in the hope that some portion of the Eastern mystic tradition—however slim—might be salvaged. Well, now, having read all of the *Tao of Physics* once, and some of it twice, I am pleased to be able to announce that we can all relax. It is not that the *Tao of Physics* is wrong, but rather—in the phrase of the great Austrian physicist Wolfgang Pauli—it is *not even* wrong.

First a word about Mr. Capra—or Dr. Capra, since he has a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Vienna, taken in 1966. Judging from his book—which, by the way,

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has had a very wide circulation, practically a best-seller—he has had a sound education in modern physics and has worked in the theory of elementary particles in a serious way. According to the jacket copy of his book, he is currently at Berkeley. But also, judging from the book, his serious contact with the subject stopped several years ago. To a practicing elementary-particle theorist, Mr. Capra's book has a sort of antique charm. The theoretical models about which he is most enthusiastic—the so-called "S-matrix theory" and the "bootstrap," which had a certain vogue a decade ago—are at best of largely academic interest to most contemporary workers in the field. On the other hand, the atomic model of elementary particles, the model according to which quarks are confined within these objects—which Mr. Capra is in despair of as not being able to provide a detailed dynamical theory—has never enjoyed more success than it does at present. This, however, is not really at the heart of the matter. At the heart of the matter is Mr. Capra's methodology—his use of what seem to me to be accidental similarities of language as if these were somehow evidence of deeply rooted connections. I would summarize my appraisal of how he goes about this by means of a riddle: "What did Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein have in common?" Answer: "They both had beards except for Einstein."

In fairness to Mr. Capra, a close reading of his book—especially the epilogue—indicates that he is aware of the limitations of the parallels he attempts to draw. But even these limitations are discussed, in my view, with such ambiguity that many readers—like my artist friends—will have great difficulty in sorting out what is really being said. Take the following passages that occur in juxtaposition:

> The Eastern religious philosophies are concerned with timeless mystical knowledge which lies beyond reasoning and cannot be adequately expressed in words. The relation of this knowledge to modern physics is but one of its many aspects and, like all the others, it cannot be demonstrated conclusively but has to be experienced in a direct intuitive way.

If this is so, one may well ask, then what is Capra doing writing a three-hundred-page book about the relation? Be that as it may, he goes on:

> What I hope to have achieved, to some extent, therefore is not a rigorous demonstration, but rather to have given the reader an opportunity to relive, every now and then, an experience which has been for me a source of continuing joy and inspiration: that the principal theories of modern physics lead to a view of the world which is internally consistent and in perfect harmony with the views of Eastern mysticism. . . . For those who have experienced this harmony, the significance of the parallels between the world-views of physicists and mystics is beyond any doubt. The interesting question, then, is not *whether* these parallels exist but *why;* and furthermore what their existence implies.

Far be it from me to begrudge Mr. Capra his mystic vision. When one is in love, the whole world looks a bit Zen-ish. If for him these parallels exist "beyond any doubt," that is his affair. But what I do begrudge him is the way in which he goes about things in his book once he actually gets down to cases. Take the following: "A further similarity between the ways of the physicist and [the] mystic is the fact that their observations take place in realms which are inaccessible to the ordinary senses." What—one is led to ask—is an "observation" in physics that takes place "in realms inaccessible to the ordinary senses"? What is a nonscientist reader supposed to make of this? And what is such a reader to make of what follows?

> Mystics often talk about experiencing higher dimensions in which impressions of different centers of consciousness are integrated into a harmonious whole. A similar situation exists in modern physics where a four dimensional "space-time" formalism has been developed which unifies concepts and observations belonging to different categories in the ordinary three-dimensional world. In both fields, the multidimensional experiences transcend the sensory world and are therefore almost impossible to express in ordinary language.

Is Mr. Capra trying to say here that the theory of relativity, which we teach on a routine basis to every student of physics, can only be grasped by Oriental mystics, that it somehow defies expression? If not, what *is* he trying to say? The four-dimensional formalism of the theory of relativity—which, by the way, in

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the beginning Einstein himself never much liked—is a mathematical artifact. The use of the word "dimension" in mathematics is an abstract extension of what is familiar and tactile in three dimensions, and there is no reason to make much of a fuss over it. If the theory of relativity is profound and surprising, this is just because it reveals connections among observations that were unanticipated. These connections and observations can be, and are, described in great detail and with great clarity in innumerable textbooks. Relativity is a beautiful theory, and, in my view, Mr. Capra's mystic befuddling of it is nothing but a travesty and a disservice.

The same goes, as far as I am concerned, for his use of illustrations and diagrams, which are put together in ways that appear to me to border on sophistry. Take, for example, the two pages that precede part 3 of the text. On the right-hand page there are something like twenty lines of what I assume is Sanskrit—no doubt a sacred text of some sort. Since no translation or explanation is given, we are left to fend for ourselves. But on the left-hand page I *know* what the symbols mean. They are a mathematical model for what particle theorists call a "chiral algebra." This is a kind of approximate mathematical symmetry useful in elementary particle theory. The two pages of symbols—neither explained in the text and both altogether incomprehensible to the average reader—stare mutely at each other, while across the top of one page is written in large letters "The Parallels." One might take this as simply an agreeable way to illustrate a new chapter heading except that the same sort of thing occurs throughout the text, giving the reader every right to assume that these parallel illustrations actually convey some information. For example, Siva's dance, illustrated with a photograph of a magnificent twelfth-century bronze, is supposed to have something to do with the notion that "modern physics has thus revealed that every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also *is* an energy dance; a pulsating process of creation and destruction"—the Last Tango in Berkeley. A diagram from the *I Ching* with eight extensions is "even vaguely similar to the meson octet . . . in which particles and anti-particles occupy opposite places." It is also vaguely similar to the Ferris wheel in an amusement park.

From the foregoing the reader may, somehow, have gotten the idea that I do not entirely like Mr. Capra's book. More than that, I do not like the tradition of which this book is only a recent example. Throughout the history of science there have been visionaries who were certain "beyond any doubt" that the science of their epoch was intimately linked with some religion or philosophy, or even with a political ideal. The Church in Galileo's day had no doubt that Aristotle's faulty view of inertia had to be accepted as part of the Christian faith. In our own time, Soviet party theoreticians in the 1930s had no doubt that relativity was "antimaterialistic" and hence anathematic, while the Nazi party philosophers were just as sure that relativity was not Aryan—that it was "Jewish" and "communistic."

The philosophical traditions that Mr. Capra evokes are benign in comparison. The Oriental mystic's view of the universe is a gentle one. There is a feeling of harmony about it. But when a writer—any writer—says that the parallels between any branch of science and some mystic view of the universe are valid "beyond any doubt," my blood begins to freeze. The most valuable commodity that we have in science is doubt. In modern physics we have learned to doubt nearly everything that our predecessors believed only a few decades ago. It is not that they deliberately set out to mislead us, but rather that they simply did not know what we know now. In this respect the one thing that I am sure of, beyond any doubt, is that the science of the present will look as antiquated to our successors as much of nineteenth-century science looks to us now. To hitch a religious philosophy to a contemporary science is a sure route to its obsolescence. To say, as Mr. Capra does in the introduction to his book, that its readers "will find that Eastern mysticism provides a consistent and beautiful philosophical framework which can accommodate our most advanced theories of the physical world" is, as far as I am concerned, either to say that this framework is so vague that it can accommodate anything or to say that the validity of Eastern mystic philosophy

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will stand or fall with that of modern physics. I do not see how one can have it both ways.

This is not to say that there is no place for a mystic sensibility in scientists. Many of the greatest of them—Einstein above all and Newton before him—have had profound mystic feelings about the universe. These have come about, I think, from the scientists' sense of wonder at the comprehensibility of the universe, of its laws and workings, and that these could be grasped by the human mind. That comprehensibility Einstein saw as the "eternal mystery." Thus I agree with Capra when he writes, "Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science but man needs both." What no one needs, in my opinion, is this superficial and profoundly misleading book.

Whether Art Passes, or Should Pass, or Endures

Tom Johnson

Afterwards, in the closeness of your room,
We talked far into the night.

You were talking about art, the way you do;
I could not hear you through the counting of the rain.

The slimmest figure of a girl was dancing
To your words, across the smooth top of your desk;

The last note of a girl's song, six hours before,
Had lingered momentarily seconds ago

Or was lingering now. Then the room had caught
By its half-light, by its far, hushed lateness,

The tenor of our wondering;
And though you were talking academically

About Vermeer, I could see you listening.
Both of us were wondering what death is.

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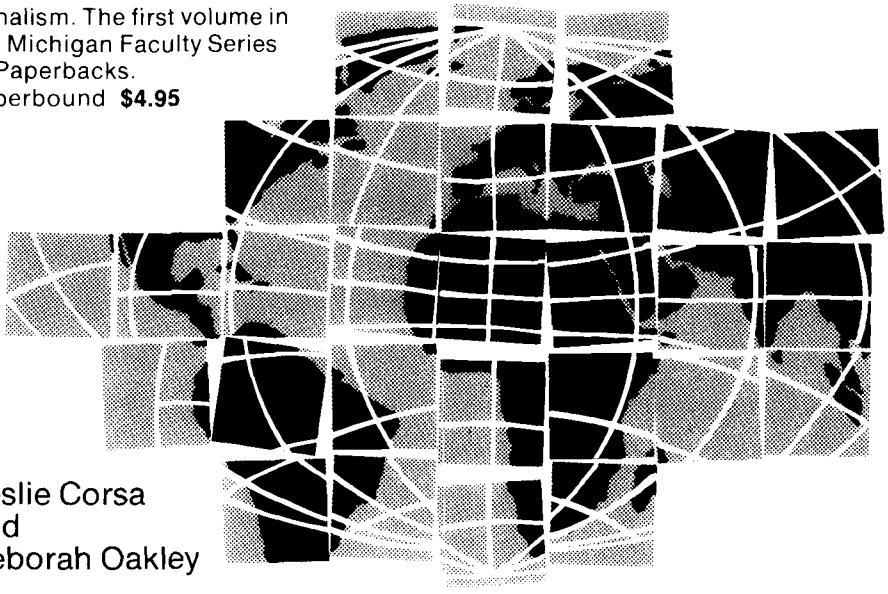

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Dandies Askew

ARISTIDES

Right up there on the scale of boring things to do, alongside telling stories of one's sexual conquests and reporting on the scholastic achievements of one's children, is recounting one's dreams. At the risk of boring, then, I have a dream to recount—a nightmare, as it turns out. I am driving on the San Diego Freeway in Los Angeles when an enormous truck pushes my car, a rented Mercedes convertible, over to the side of the road, and thence over a guardrail, from where I plunge to my death. My body, which is sent from the Los Angeles County morgue to a local funeral home, is badly burned, though the features of my face are still recognizable. The director of the funeral home telephones my family, informing them that he will be pleased to prepare their loved one for burial. This they, my grieving family, give him permission to do. My clothes have been burned in the car crash and so has my hair. The funeral director has no photograph of me, but he can make out that I, the deceased, was a man of early middle age. He determines to dress me for burial in what, in Los Angeles, is his estimation of the style of the day.

Here the nightmare begins in earnest. First he fits me out in a wig, a tight little helmet of black hair, which covers my ears and comes down in soft bangs on my forehead. He slides a flowery shirt over my torso, leaving the top three buttons undone. Around my neck he attaches two gold chains, one with a symbol of my religious faith, the other with my astrological sign. My body is next slipped into a denim suit, with prominent orange stitching and lavish bell-bottom trousers. On my feet he places boots of a crinkly black patent leather with gold buckles. Whether to paste a Fu Manchu or a Zapata mustache across my lip or to leave it naked is a decision, he feels, that can await the arrival of my family. As a finishing touch, he puts a large gold digital watch upon my left wrist—a watch that is, quite properly, self-winding.

Since having had that nightmare, I have intended to add a codicil to my will. I have formulated this codicil only in rough draft; no doubt a legal hand will be required to put it in final form. But here is what I have in mind:

"Should the deceased die before the age of fifty, he wishes to be buried in a blue blazer with dull gold buttons, dark gray trousers, and Bass Weejun loafers (black or cordovan brown, color optional). His socks should be black and should ride up over the calf; his shirt be solid white or light blue and of a durable oxford cloth, though if neither of these is ready to hand, a stripe of conservative tendency will do. If a striped shirt is chosen, he wishes to be buried wearing a necktie of solid color, something lively but not obstreperous—a maroon, say, or possibly a forest green or a quiet yellow; if a solid-color shirt is available, he wishes to be buried wearing a striped tie or one of subdued chalet pattern. He wishes no jewelry to go with him (arrangements for disposal of his wristwatch and the pocket watch of his grandfather are made elsewhere in this document). The same goes for hair: he demands to be buried with whatever hair he has remaining atop his head cut short and parted on the right side, and his face to be clean of sideburns, earlocks, muttonchops, mustache of any shape or variety, beard, goatee, or imperial. If the deceased is over fifty years of age, he wishes all the above to apply, except that in place of blazer and trousers he prefers to be buried in a suit of either blue or dark gray. In setting out these instructions, he would have it known that he wants to depart this earth in the style he has

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lived upon it: that is to say, square, utterly square, but square after his own fashion. Although his good deeds have been few, he nevertheless does not choose to risk having God fail to recognize him."

Oh vanity, thy name is Aristides! But mine is, I believe, vanity of a special (though scarcely unique) kind: the vanity of a man who, above all, does not wish to appear vain. Not all male vanity is of this kind. Alongside male birds like myself, who prefer to travel in camouflage, others go in for elegant plumage, and most fall somewhere in between. Male vanity is doubtless as various as female vanity, and differs from it chiefly in that men, at least in modern times, have not been allowed to give full vent to their vanity. It has been deemed unmanly to seem to care too much about clothes and appearance generally. Yet rare is the man who can look on with equanimity as his hair falls out or his middle thickens and spreads. The vanity of males, having no obvious or traditional outlet, might just exceed that of females.

Vanity is no doubt worth contemning, except that it is partly allied with curiosity—curiosity about that most continuously fascinating of subjects: oneself. Surely it is a superior cosmic joke that, despite all our attempts at introspection, from astrology to psychoanalysis, none of us truly knows what he looks like. Each of us has probably studied his defects. Oh yes, we can pick ourselves out of a group photograph; nor is it a stranger who stares back, his jaws slathered in soap, out of the shaving mirror. But who with confidence can say of himself or herself, "Mine is a kindly—or intelligent, or elegant, or intriguing—face"? Or who has honesty enough to say of himself or herself, "Mine is a vicious—or ignorant, or coarse, or boring—face"? No face is so grotesque that its owner is not able to find a certain charm in it; no face is so charming that its owner is not able to find a certain grotesqueness in it.

Tolstoy, who had a potato nose and few teeth, spoke with his usual acuity about faces. "It seems to me," he writes, "that what we call beauty in a face lies in the smile; if the smile heightens the charm of the face, the face is a beautiful one; if it does not alter it, the face is ordinary; and if it is spoilt by a smile, it is ugly." Interesting though this is—more than interesting, in my opinion, it is true—nonetheless it is not easily applied to oneself. If you do not believe me, try smiling before a mirror.

If our information about our own faces is imperfect, is what we know about our own bodies that much more exact? Do not most fat men secretly think themselves graceful? Does not the most beautiful woman fear that she, in the matter of figure, has too little of this or too much of the other? A person cannot be too rich or too thin, said Babe Paley, wife of William Paley, the chairman of the board of CBS, and herself a regular in the pages of women's fashion magazines. Through careful and strenuous diet I once lost twenty-odd pounds, and as a result thought myself wondrously trim; it came as something of a disappointment that others only thought I had a wasting disease.

Getting our physical selves into clear focus is not an easy thing. I recall an occasion, some fifteen or so years ago, when I was got up in a tan corduroy jacket, a plaid shirt and black knit tie—this at a time when one did not usually wear dark shirts with ties—and considered myself very much in the getup of a literary man: a Czech poet in exile, perhaps, or a minor English novelist of exquisite sensibility. One could probably have heard the air seep out of me when a young woman I was introduced to that day asked if I were a furrier. A fur trapper I could have accepted, but a furrier? I was not at all sure what a furrier looked like, and less sure than ever what I looked like.

Am I alone in this inexact knowledge about my own appearance? I suspect not—a suspicion based on my view of the habiliments my fellow men choose for themselves. I am sitting in the aisle seat at a neighborhood movie theater, watching men walk up and down the aisle before the start of the film. What a parade it is! Here is a man in a velour jump suit, bald but for a ring of gray hair, yet with a fierce set of chin whiskers of the kind the old cartoon-strip character Bathless Groggins used to sport. Down the aisle strides a pudgy young man in cut-off jeans, tennis shoes, tube socks pulled up to the knees, a T-shirt bearing the inscription "I Wanna Be Me," and a hairdo (a permanent?) of careful curls—a white man's version of an Afro (a Caucasio, possibly?). Up comes a man with snowy sideburns three fingers thick, wearing an ultra-

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suede leisure suit which I have heard described alternately as a "Skokie walking suit" or a "Cleveland." Much denim is seen clambering up and down this aisle, clinging to thighs and bottoms of old and young alike. The hot comb has done its contorting work on many a skull here. (And elsewhere: under President Jimmy Carter we have the first hot comb in the White House; his may be remembered as not the imperial but the hair-styled presidency.) But no sooner does one think that most men are attempting to conceal their baldness than down the aisle lopes a young Negro man who has shaved his head. Now comes a gent in white shoes and, atop red trousers, a white belt—the height, the very Acropolis, of Rotarian haberdashery—yet damned if he isn't wearing a Che Guevara beard: Babbitt and bohemian all in one man.

And what about his nibs, your genial columnist, Brummell-D'Orsay-Baudelaire-Disraeli-Montesquiou-Beerbohm Aristides? How is he got up for this movie? He is not exactly, it is sad to report, bespoke. In the prose style of the men's fashion magazines, here he is: Aristides prefers casual clothes for a night at the movies. His chino pants are by Ralph Lauren ($60); sandals by Thom McAn ($11.95); socks, since he isn't wearing any, are by nobody ($.00); T-shirt with "Circuit Court Club" printed over the left breast by a firm ashamed to put its name to it, owning up only to Kodel-Polyester ($3.50); and a jogging jacket borrowed from a son who in turn borrowed it from someone else, by Warm Up Suit (price unknown). This is, remember, a neighborhood theater, and informality of a kind that is possible nowadays seems, if not a great boon, a small yet serious comfort. By contrast, I recall my father, at my age, putting on a tie and suit coat and adjusting the brim of his hat at the mirror near the front door, before going out to the corner drugstore for a newspaper.

As the getup I have just described ought to make sufficiently clear, I make no claims to any standing as an arbiter elegantiarum. I should not, though, mind if we had such a figure about these days. An arbiter elegantiarum on men's clothes might set a standard that one could at least choose to flee from. A magazine called *Gentleman's Quarterly*, which is exclusively given over to men's clothes, exists; it was founded by Arnold Gingrich, who was also the founding editor of *Esquire*. But *GQ*, as the magazine styles itself, does not pass muster; it is arbitrary, all right, but not very elegant. It is in thrall to fashion, which is not always synonymous with style and at the moment seems downright antonymous with style. *GQ*'s September number, for example, has men in leather trousers, thin ties, fur coats, itchy though neither warm nor suave-looking sweaters. Everywhere in its pages these men stare out, sullen of mien, with their suit and jacket collars turned up. Sometimes they are photographed with women, but they do not seem very interested in these women. Male narcissism seems to reign. Or perhaps they are angry at the ugly clothes they have to wear. *GQ* does not in any case seem a magazine for family men.

Neither, in quite a different way, is *Playboy*, which used fairly regularly to run pieces on men's fashions. Even though one gathers that the ideal *Playboy* reader would be for the better part of his days *sans culotte*, a man named Robert L. Green once advised *Playboy* readers what to put on between matings. Mr. Green has now written a book, *Live with Style*, in which he is described as a "fashion arbiter and consultant." Here, from his book, is a sample of his advice and the tone it comes in:

> It's the total look that counts. Don't hold desperately to an earlier image. What looked chic in the 1930s is a joke today. . . . The distinguished look of the straight-laced 'fifties is boring in the 'seventies. The sterile perfection of "correct" clothes is replaced by doing it your own way. You should be an independent man or woman who is perfectly capable of deciding for yourself what subtle updating you want to bring to your party wardrobe. By all means unbutton your casual shirt if it makes you look sexier but not if you look as if you were going to bed.

This may be sensible as advice goes but it is not to my taste. It is not, for one thing, arbitrary enough; and it is not, for another, well enough written. If one is going to write about style one had best do it with style. Mr. Green's prose is blowsy.

One trap to be avoided in writing about men's clothes is effeminacy. Another is snobbery. Even if one feels clothes are important, it is well to remember that they are not that important. The great cannonade against the interest in male attire is, of course, Thomas

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Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. "A Dandy," Carlyle writes, "is a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress." Although Carlyle's has been the most boisterous attack on clothes, a high-minded contempt for clothes has always been part of intellectual tradition—rather as if clothes were too trivial a matter to give time to by people who think great thoughts. Thus Socrates, in Plato, is regularly referred to as wearing his "shabby old mantle." Tolstoy, we know from photographs, paraded about Yasnaya Polyana in the loose blouse and baggy trousers of a peasant. Orwell affected workingmen's tweeds and corduroy trousers.

As contemporary politics ought by now to have taught, style is scarcely ever the man. "Style is the manner of a man or woman or inanimate object. It is never the substance. . . ." That quotation comes from the late George Frazier, the best modern writer on the subject of men's clothes that I have read. Frazier was a columnist for the *Boston Globe*, where he wrote about much else besides clothes, and an entertainment editor at the old *Life*. I used to read him in *Esquire*, where he published articles under such titles as "The Dapper Wrinkles of Seersucker," "Splendor in the Brass" (about English and Scottish uniforms and tailors), and "The Second Greatest Shoeshine in America" (to be had, it turns out, at the airport in Cleveland; the first, or greatest, was a dead-heat tie between the shoe-shine man at the Hotel Pierre and the man at the Waldorf). As befits a man interested in style, George Frazier was himself a stylish character. He would bring his own hot dogs (Tobin's) to football games in Boston, where he paid the concessionaires the regular price of a hot dog to grill them for him. He held conferences with *Esquire* editors in a rowboat in Central Park, for which he packed a lunch of martinis and sandwiches. He wrote an undergraduate essay at Harvard that won the Bowdoin Prize, and bought a suit with the proceeds—a suit that, decade after decade, never ceased to fit him.

George Frazier's own taste in clothes ran to the British and the traditional. ("Dress British and think Yiddish," a recent maxim has it.) His ideal male dressers, apotheoses of masculine elegance, were Fred Astaire, Clark Gable, and William Faulkner; of men of an earlier generation, he approved of Jimmy Walker, the Duke of Windsor, and Herbert Bayard Swope (one of whose neckties was once borrowed for a Broadway play and appropriately credited in the program notes as "on loan from the Herbert Bayard Swope, Sr., collection"). Andy Williams, Johnny Carson, and Leonard Bernstein were Frazier's idea of ill-dressed men, or at least men who did not come off because they failed to understand that a stylish masculine appearance must never betray the care taken to achieve it; concern itself must be concealed.

Frazier defined style as "that intangible quality that, at its most compelling, touches our hearts, arouses our enthusiasm, and sometimes makes us so much its captive that we can't see straight." Examples of style for George Frazier were the inflection in Laurence Olivier's voice; Duke Ellington hunched over his piano playing "Satin Doll"; the Baltimore quarterback Johnny Unitas standing straight up in the pocket, with would-be tacklers, blood in their eyes, rushing madly in on him. But if Frazier knew the excitement of style, he also knew its limitations. He knew style was not character (a higher thing), nor was it fashion (a lower thing). Style is not the man, yet its presence or absence is part of the man.

Which part? Not so easily pinned down, to take a trope from tailoring, yet the clothes a man chooses, or disdains, are important facets of him. Tolstoy wore the costume of the peasant and Orwell that of the workingman to show their contempt for the fripperies of the official dress of the classes into which each had been born (aristocracy and lower-upper-middle, respectively). Their choices were far from negligible, but were political. Tolstoy got up in the finery of Dickens, with his flamboyant waistcoats, cravats, outsize cuff links, rings, and the rest, is unthinkable. So, too, is the prospect of the austere Orwell in the country-gentleman duds of Evelyn Waugh. Clothes, in these instances, did not make the men, but they most assuredly were part of them.

Clothes have traditionally functioned as a badge. They used to tell you where a man

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stood, sometimes implied his aspirations, and occasionally conveyed his view of himself. Especially was this so in large cities. ("In the country," Balzac wrote in *Eugénie Grandet*, "people cease to care about their appearance. They no longer dress to please others, and eventually become reluctant even to buy a new pair of gloves.") Theodore Dreiser, that great genius-klutz of American fiction, knew what it was to want good clothes; and more than this, within his range he knew the social meaning of clothes with precision. Clothes play a part in all Dreiser's novels, but in *Sister Carrie* so large is the part they play that they nearly qualify as a character. "A woman," Dreiser writes, "should some day write the complete philosophy of clothes. No matter how young, it is one of the things she wholly comprehends. There is an indescribably faint line in the matter of man's apparel which somehow divides for her those who are worth glancing at and those who are not."

Before Dreiser, all the great nineteenth-century novelists dressed out their characters with some care. Closer to our own day, John O'Hara was a writer much interested in clothes. One of his stories was entitled "The Windowpane Check." Another, "The Sharks," begins, "Mr. Plastic Rain Cover for His Hat was taking his daily constitutional." In an O'Hara story it was not unusual to come upon a sentence like the following: "His clothes were perfect; a reddish tweed jacket, sleeveless sweater, tan slacks, Tattersall shirt, knitted necktie." He was often criticized for this, the criticism being that such interests were superficial. But surely a man's choice of clothes is as important, novelistically, as his accent or choice of vocabulary.

Yet O'Hara was not alone among modern novelists in being interested in his characters' dress. F. Scott Fitzgerald shared this interest. Mary McCarthy's best known story is "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt." Saul Bellow, in his story "A Father-to-Be," gets a good deal of fictional wear out of this bit of haberdashery in prose:

> Meanwhile, he had not interrupted his examination of the passengers and had fallen into a study of the man next to him. This was a man whom he had never in his life seen before but with whom he now suddenly felt linked through all existence. . . . The coat he wore was a fairly expensive blue check such as Rogin would never have chosen for himself. He would not have worn blue suede shoes, either, or such a faultless hat, a cumbersome felt animal of a hat encircled by a high, fat ribbon. There are all kinds of dandies, not all of them are of the flaunting kind; some are dandies of respectability, and Rogin's fellow passenger was one of these. . . . Wearing such blue suede shoes, he could not afford to have people treading on his feet, and he seemed to draw about himself a circle of privilege, notifying all others to mind their own business and let him read his paper.

Increasingly nowadays characters in fiction are unclothed, rather like mannequins in shops awaiting a window dresser, and novels and stories are not better for it.

Dickens, himself a triple-crown clothes-horse, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* has Mark Tapley say: "Any man may be in good spirits and good temper when he's well dressed. There ain't much credit in that." I agree. Although I think myself a man who, in some rough way, lives the life of the mind, I am regularly surprised to discover how, over the years, certain items of apparel have lifted my spirits. I have owned neckties that, when I wore them, allowed me to convince myself I was witty. As a boy tennis player I had a pair of tan Fred Perry tennis shorts that—you will have to take my word on this—gave my second serve an added hop it did not have in Wilson or Spaulding shorts. I once bought a raincoat—brand name Mackintosh, place of purchase Abercrombie & Fitch—that, whenever I put it on, filled me with energy and ambition. Unfortunately the company ceased to make it, else I should doubtless be writing this column from my office in the United States Senate building.

Fashions in men's clothes, alas, change nearly as often as in women's. Leaving well enough alone is evidently a sentiment no designer of clothes finds tolerable. Epaulets must be put on what were once one's favorite shirts; tuxedos must be made out of the fabric called double-knit; collars and colors of raincoats must be altered to look worse. Not long ago, invited to a black-tie dinner and owning no dinner clothes, I went out to rent some. This proved no simple chore. The range of rental possibilities seemed to be between a tuxedo of the kind worn by a member of Desi Arnaz, Sr.'s, old Cuban orchestra and that of a procurer on holiday at the seashore. I finally located a store that rented fairly straight-

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forward black tuxedos. The manager—it was one of a chain—said he thought he had what I wanted but he had better call the central store to see if they had my size. "Jake," he said into the phone, "Sid here. I got a 39 regular in the store. We got anything in a Tony Martin for him?"

One might as well try to persuade the tide not to go out as to argue against fashion, which is no less inexorable. "Fashion," as Gabrielle Chanel said, "is made to become unfashionable"—by which she meant, of course, that fashion is ever meant to be replaced by newer fashion. Fashion is a kind of dialectic that knows no synthesis; it is all thesis and antithesis. If fashion calls for men to wear their hair long, in time the fashionable in their boredom will begin to cut theirs short. If neckties become luxuriously wide, fashion soon dictates they must be severely narrow; trousers flared, taper them; collars long, shorten them; and so it goes. Some things—loafers, knit ties—come in, go out, and come back in fashion; a few others—blue blazers, cardigan sweaters—never go completely out of fashion. Yet custom in clothes can sometimes stale. Fashion can be insidious. One laughs at bell-bottom trousers, then six months later looks down to discover one is wearing them.

What is noteworthy about the current day is that no single masculine style seems dominant. Jock, rock, hippy, dippy, ivy, jivey—instead of a dominant style, there is this smorgasbord from which, apparently, one takes a bit of this, a bit of that, a bit of the other. The gates opened in the 1960s, in what George Frazier called "the Peacock Revolution," and through them have passed, and continue to pass: Guevara beards, cowboy boots, neck chains, handlebar and other mustachios, purses, safari jackets, Russian leather, T-shirts with jokes imprinted on them, unisex haircuts, white shoes, body shirts worn open to the *pupik*. We are talking here about "lifestyle," as in the Bloomingdale's men's store advertisement that reads, "Burberry, more than a label, a lifestyle." Burberry used to be, doubtless still is, a splendid raincoat. Why does it have to be sold as a lifestyle?

Because, one gathers, lifestyles are what people seem to be in the market for. Unlike a life, a lifestyle, as currently construed, is a thing you can turn in, exchange, swap for another. One result of this shuffling of lifestyles is that you can scarcely tell what people do, or are, by their clothes. A certain pride is sometimes involved in not dressing in a manner that might give away what one does. That young man with long hair and dirty jeans—is he a gas station attendant or an assistant professor? That man with a permanent of tight curls and a Fu Manchu mustache—is he a pit boss in Vegas or a reform rabbi? Perhaps the chief reason why novelists now spend so little time describing their characters' clothes is that clothes are telling less and less about character.

Yet, one might respond, what is the point in having a man's clothes serve as his uniform, a badge that tells you pretty much everything that you need to know about him? Things truly are cooler under the new dispensation, less hierarchical, more egalitarian. James Laver, the historian of dress, would disagree. Laver ends his little book *Modesty in Dress* with a photograph of a young man and woman in similar sweaters, jeans, and haircuts, and with the following threnody: "We, as children of an age which values equality above everything else and calls envy social justice, must congratulate ourselves that all these frivolities [of distinctive and distinguished dress] are no more, that Modesty has proved finally victorious over its two foes, the Lust of the Eye and the Pride of Life, that the Socialist Paradise has been reached at last, and Thorstein Veblen can lie quiet in his grave."

Many would disagree with James Laver, whose criticism is chiefly aesthetic. A deeper criticism, though, is possible, a psychological one. It is that all this male costuming, this dressing up without regard to one's age, social class, true outlook, has to do with avoiding the formation of character. Men once looked upon their lives as works of art. A life was viewed as having a beginning, a middle, an end; a shape given it by experience; a tone lent it by life's vicissitudes. Clothes were part of this, and a man chose his clothes in accordance with his conception of himself. By his choice of clothes, and by the way he wore them, one could tell things about a man; if one were astute, one could tell a great many things. "This costume," wrote Balzac, after describing the clothes of Jérôme-Nicolas Séchard in his novel *Lost Illusions*, "thanks to

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which the artisan was still manifest behind the bourgeois, was so suited to his vices and habits, so expressive of his way of life, that he looked as if he had come into the world fully clad: you could no more have imagined him without his clothes than you could imagine an onion without its peel." Ellen Moers, in her excellent study *The Dandy*, remarks that what so impressed people with the young Max Beerbohm, who always gave the most scrupulous attention to his clothes, was that even as an undergraduate at Oxford he seemed to have "a finished personality."

I suspect the very notion of a finished personality is repugnant to most people today. A "formed character" seems positively alien to the spirit of the age. Rather than be finished or formed, most people, in the rotting botanical metaphor of the day, would prefer to keep on "growing." Men may wear T-shirts that read "I Wanna Be Me," but they appear to wear the clothes of someone else. If they do not quite seem to wanna be them, it is far from clear whom they wanna be. Increasingly, men wear clothes to obscure, rather than reveal, character. They wear, one might say, their so-called identity crises not so much on, but as part of, their sleeve.

It may well be that one can have either a life or a number of lifestyles, but not both. Many more men than not, or so it seems to me, are choosing lifestyles. One sees them everywhere: in office buildings, at movies, in movies and on television, in one's rearview mirror. Wearing sunglasses, helmets of hot-combed hair, sprayed mustaches, they seem not so much dressed as disguised—possibly above all from themselves. Each time I sight a fresh batch of these dandies askew I recall the first sentence of a story I have always wanted to write, which is perhaps better pressed into service as the last line of this essay. The sentence runs: "At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, Freddy Kaplan, urgently seeking a change in lifestyle, checked into University Hospital, where he had made arrangements to have a single sideburn removed."

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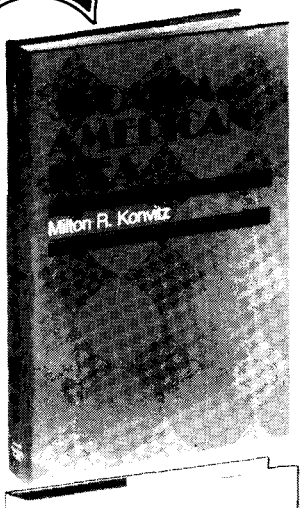

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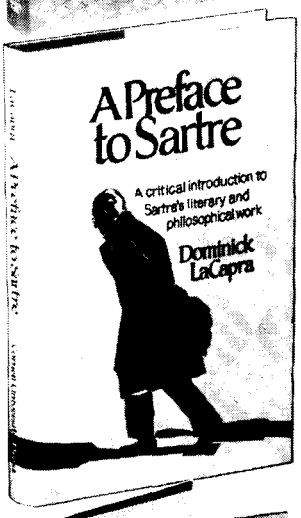

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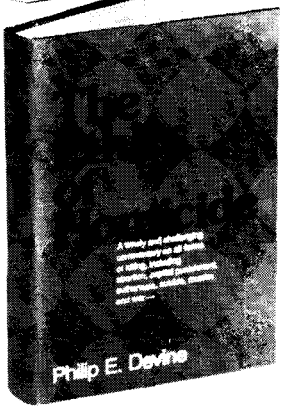

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The Intellectual World of Sir Thomas More

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER

THOMAS MORE, WHOSE QUINCENTENARY WE CELEBRATE, is one of the heroes of our age. Everyone venerates him now. Catholic and Protestant, Conservative and Socialist, traditionalist and reformer, English and Irish—all are united in his praise. Sweetness and light, spirituality and good humor, scholarship and wit emanate from his portrait, whether painted in color by Holbein or in prose by Erasmus. He is a man of marvelous completeness, and for all seasons. And naturally all of us (or at least all of us except Professor Elton) are very indignant with King Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, who sent him to the block.

Such unanimity has its dangers. There is a risk that the image of More may be made dull by the thick patina of so much praise. Some of his writings, let us face the fact, *are* rather dull. Nor are they always good-humored. How many of his admirers have really read those laborious works of his later life: those tedious and often ill-tempered tracts against Luther and the early English reformers, Frith and Tyndale, Barnes, Bilney and Fish, which entitled him to canonization? For it was not *Utopia,* nor *Richard III,* nor the translations from Lucian, nor the "merry jests" that qualified More for the company of the saints. Those works, or some of them, qualified him rather to join Erasmus, his lifelong friend, in more interesting or at least more exciting company, on the Index of Prohibited Books.

Let me, then, begin this essay by trying to save More from the saccharine praise of his unanimous admirers. This is not too difficult an operation. All we have to do is to move back a little in time. For More was not always an uncontroversial pattern of wisdom and virtue. He was not always praised for transparent simplicity, honesty, wisdom, tolerance, respect for the rights of conscience, et cetera. His death was not always regarded as the martyrdom of the human spirit. Indeed, it is only in the last half-century that this character has been given to him. For the

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first four centuries after his death he was a much more controversial, more mysterious figure. Had it been otherwise, he would surely not have had to wait four centuries for his ultimate canonization.

It was only in 1935, on the fourth centenary of his death, that the Church of Rome gave More that final sign of approval. This, on the face of it, is surprising. In the generation after his death, the Catholics had confidently prophesied such canonization. In those years a number of biographies had been written or inspired, and his works published, by the survivors of his family circle. However, nothing had happened. The biographies remained unprinted; the memory of More became an introverted family cult and in the next century died away. The Roper family did not forget their connection with More, but by the later seventeenth century they were more interested in their older connection with Archbishop Chichele. That secured them some concrete advantages: it qualified them, as Founder's Kin, for hereditary fellowships of All Souls College.

Why, we may legitimately ask, did More have to wait so long for such obvious recognition? The answer, I believe, is not far to seek. For centuries after his death, he was a totem figure of the English Catholics, and particularly, being himself a layman, of the English Catholic laity. The English lay Catholics were not, in those centuries, either very popular or very powerful in Rome. They were also regarded as tainted in their ideas: ever since the reign of James I, they had appeared dangerously "Protestant," more English than Roman. Since they were unpopular, there was no desire, and since they were weak, there was no need to humor them. Even in the nineteenth century, when they grew in strength, they remained suspect: "cisalpine," not "ultramontane"; supporters of Newman against Manning, of Acton and Döllinger against the "Vaticanism" of Pius IX. It was not until the conciliatory reign of Pope Leo XIII that peace was made. Significantly, it was then, in 1886, that More was beatified. His beatification can be seen as a sop to the English Catholic laity, comparable with the cardinalate of Newman, the reconciliation with Acton. The English Protestants, meanwhile, looked on with indifference. They had never shown much interest in More.

Then came the canonization of 1935. At first this episode too was treated with indifference by English Protestants. The British government took no official notice of the event, regarding it as an internal Catholic affair. Nevertheless, from that date More's historical character changed. From a recusant figurehead he became a great Englishman in whom Protestants as well as Catholics could take pride; and Protestants and Catholics vied to revive his fame, his works, his history.

First of all, in the very year of the canonization came the classic biography by the Anglican scholar R. W. Chambers. In the ensuing years

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the early biographies of More—almost all written in the generation after his death, and in his family circle—were printed or reprinted. So were some of his own writings. His statue was set up in the borough of Chelsea, where he had lived, and this time even Protestants were allowed (somewhat grudgingly) to join the celebration.

Meanwhile this English cult was being overtaken by another, wider movement: the More industry, from English, was becoming international. In 1963 the "More project" was launched at Yale, and the complete works of More, unpublished since the mid-sixteenth century, began to reappear, edited and annotated with devoted scholarship. In the same year the Abbé Germain Marc'hadour in Angers founded an international association, the *Amici Thomae Mori,* whose membership now extends across the world and whose publication, *Moreana,* has appeared regularly for fifteen years. At the same time More was made famous by Mr. Robert Bolt's play and Mr. Fred Zinnemann's film. In this quincentenary year there have been conferences and colloquies on More everywhere. From a great Englishman he has become again—as he had been in his own lifetime—a universal genius, a great citizen of the world.

This last stage in the revival of More, it should be noted, is quite independent of his Catholicism. This is shown by the simultaneous revival of More's greatest friend, Erasmus. In the previous four centuries, Erasmus had hardly been regarded as Catholic at all. During most of them, his works had been published only in Protestant countries. Today he has been brought out of his cramped Protestant cupboard, just as More has been brought out of his narrow Catholic niche. To him, too, great works of scholarship have recently been devoted. His complete works, too, are now being republished. His name has become a symbol of the new cosmopolitanism. There is an Erasmus prize for those who serve European unity. There is even an Erasmus international train, passing—as he did, but more swiftly and luxuriously—up and down the Rhine.

The reason for this double revival, this reconvergence of two long-separated friends, is clear enough. It springs less from their times than from ours. More and Erasmus, constant friends in their lives, were torn apart, after death, by warring ideologues. Thus severed, they shrank in stature and in the nineteenth century both were devalued. No nineteenth-century English historians, not even the Catholics Lingard and Acton, thought much of More. If More and Erasmus have been reunited in our time, and thereby restored to their original greatness, it is partly, at least, as symbols of that ecumenical movement which, after four centuries of division, seeks to restore the spiritual unity of Christendom.

Of course, there is some danger in seeing the past through the present. The modern glass through which we look may show us new

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aspects, but it may also discolor or distort. The English Catholics who, in the England of Mary Tudor, or abroad in Catholic Flanders during the reign of Elizabeth, narrated More's life and published his works, omitted certain aspects of both which seemed to them incompatible with the new orthodoxy of the Council of Trent. Modern liberals similarly slide over his rough handling of Protestants in London and credit him with views on the absolute liberty of conscience which he did not hold. If we are not to make comparable errors, we must try to see him in his own context, not ours.

Even within that context, he is mysterious enough. For in spite of the innocent simplicity which he cultivated, in life as in writing, More was not an easily intelligible character. Great men seldom are. He fits into no convenient category. To contemporaries, even to his own household, he was an enigma. Why did this open enemy of mortification and of superstitious observances secretly wear a hair shirt next to his skin? Why did he refuse to take the oath of supremacy, at which none of his devoted household boggled? Why did he give no reasons for that mortification or this martyrdom? What, above all, is the meaning of *Utopia*? While his friends were bewildered, his opponents, of course, were positively exasperated by the complexity of his character. In particular, they were maddened by his apparent levity, the indecent flippancy (as they thought it) which masked his purpose and enabled him to evade serious discussion. The same charge, of course, was brought against Erasmus by his critics, who described him as a sophist, a changeling, an amorphous polyp, a slippery mouse.

In an attempt to grasp this Protean spirit, I propose to look at More in his own intellectual context; to identify the tradition to which he attached himself; to watch, if possible, the formation of his mind. This cannot be done from purely biographical evidence. We have very few contemporary sources for More's early years. We know little of his studies. We have very few of his books, no personal papers; for all such property was confiscated when he was declared a traitor. His papers have all mysteriously disappeared. Almost all that we know on this subject is retrospective, from his own writings or those of Erasmus. We shall have to rely largely on deduction, implication, association. This method is necessarily tentative. However, it is more fruitful, I think, than to see him anachronistically, retrospectively, through an iridescent halo or mist.

The outline of More's early career is clear enough. He was born in 1478 and sent to school in London. Thereafter he served in the household of Cardinal Morton, who afterward sent him to the University of Oxford. From Oxford he went to the Inns of Court to study law. All this reveals nothing of his mind. Then suddenly, in 1499, we have a shaft of

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light. Erasmus comes for the first time to England, and in his letters reveals the new world he has discovered there.

In some ways, this first English visit of Erasmus, which was to have such large consequence for him and for us, was an accident, a deviation. Erasmus, at that time, was based in Paris. He had not intended to come to England. His overriding aim was to learn Greek, or rather to improve the Greek which he had begun to learn in Paris, and for that purpose he had planned to go to Italy. Italy, at the time, was the center of Greek studies; there, as Erasmus wrote, "the very walls speak Greek." But Erasmus was diverted from Italy. His English pupil Lord Mountjoy had persuaded him to come to England. And what did he find there? To his surprise,

> a climate at once agreeable and extremely healthy, and such a quantity of intellectual refinement and scholarship, not the usual pedantic and trivial kind either, but profound and learned and truly classical, in both Latin and Greek, that I have little longing left for Italy except for the sake of visiting it. When I listen to Colet it seems to me that I am listening to Plato himself. Who could fail to be astonished at the universal scope of Grocyn's accomplishments? Could anything be more clever or profound and sophisticated than Linacre's mind? Did Nature ever create anything kinder, sweeter or more harmonious than the character of Thomas More?

Today Erasmus is famous, More is famous, their friendship is famous, and we take it all for granted. But pause and consider. More, whom Erasmus thus cites, was then a young law student, twenty-one years old. He had written nothing. He had never been abroad. And yet he is cited, naturally, even automatically, in this company of much older men whose names were already established. Grocyn, at that time, was fifty-three years old, Linacre thirty-nine, Colet thirty-three. Moreover, this company had clearly accepted him as one of themselves. Soon afterward Colet would pay a remarkable tribute to More: he would describe him as the unique genius among the many talented men of England.

And what was this company in which the young Thomas More already shone as a uniquely brilliant star? First of all, Grocyn, Linacre, Colet were all Greek scholars. All had studied Greek in Italy, and especially in Florence. That is what drew Erasmus to them, and More also. After Erasmus's departure, we find More, too, studying Greek, first under Grocyn, then under Linacre. With him, as a fellow pupil, was William Lily. Lily, too, had begun his studies abroad: he had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, had learned Greek from a Greek teacher in Rhodes and improved his knowledge in Italy. Afterward Colet would appoint him as the first high master of his own foundation, St. Paul's School. In 1504 More described Colet and Grocyn as the only masters of his life, Linacre as his present tutor, Lily as his beloved companion.

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Together, these five men—to whom we should add William Latimer, who had also studied in Italy—were the founding fathers of Greek studies in fifteenth-century England.

However, it was not Greek studies alone which united these men. They also had something else in common, and it is this something else which I wish to emphasize. They were all Platonists. They had been to Florence because Florence was the center of Platonic studies in Europe. Those studies had been brought thither in the last days of Byzantium by the last great Byzantine Platonist, the pagan Georgius Gemistus Pletho. There they had flourished, and become Christianized, or re-Christianized, in the Platonic Academy founded by Cosimo de' Medici. The great teachers at that academy were Marsilio Ficino, the editor of Plato and Plotinus, and his disciple Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the prodigy of his age. It was to hear Ficino and Pico that these Englishmen had gone to Florence, and it was their Platonic doctrine, as well as the Greek language, that they taught on their return. The ideas of Pico were preached in London by Colet, whom we have heard Erasmus compare with Plato himself. The first publication of Linacre was a translation of the Greek Neoplatonist Proclus, a pagan of the fifth century. The earliest surviving letter of More describes his attendance at Grocyn's lectures in St. Paul's Cathedral. The lectures were on Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius—the pseudo-Dionysius—was a sixth-century Syrian Neoplatonist, one of the main sources of Christian Platonism in the Middle Ages.

Like Grocyn, Colet, and Linacre, More too was a Grecian. Like them, he believed that the Greek language was the necessary means of intellectual and spiritual revival: through it, and through it alone, the science and philosophy of antiquity, the true faith of the New Testament and the fathers, could be recovered. Some of his most urgent intellectual writings—his long letter to the theologian Martin Dorp in 1517, his letter to the University of Oxford in 1518—are pleas for Greek studies, which he defends against all comers. In *Utopia* his narrator, Hythlodaye, is a Grecian and carries Greek books to that happy island ("for in Latin there was nothing that I thought that they would greatly admire"). But within Greek literature, More too, like his masters, is committed to a particular philosophy. He too is a Platonist, a Christian Platonist, inspired, like them, from Florence.

This he showed clearly in his first published work, which appeared in 1505. It was a translation into English of the biography of that "singular layman," the Florentine Platonist Pico della Mirandola, written by his nephew. Pico's life (we are told) More had chosen as a pattern for his own. He published the biography as a New Year's gift for a woman friend who had entered a nunnery as a Poor Clare. The significance of

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this publication cannot escape us. More himself had recently passed through a religious crisis. He had contemplated, for himself, the monastic life. As a law student he had lived for a time among the Carthusians of London—the most austere and uncorrupted of monks, the only monks whom Erasmus admired. But in the end he had decided to marry and live, like Pico, as a religious layman, in the world. More's *Life of John Picus, Earl of Mirandula* is in fact the apologia of a Christian Platonist addressed to one whose still-tempting example the translator has decided not, after all, to follow.

More's interest in Plato is, of course, well known. *Utopia* is, in form, an imitation of Plato's *Republic*, and Plato is often cited in it. But the biographers of More have tended to treat this as a mere literary model. I believe that this is wrong, demonstrably wrong. I believe that if we study More's thought in his early years, we must see that his mind was not merely dipped, but steeped, in Platonism: the Platonism of Pico; the Platonism of St. Augustine, who had brought Neoplatonism into Christianity; the Platonism of Plato himself. The life and ideas of Pico, says Vittorio Gabrieli, exercised "a seminal influence on his mind," and many of Pico's ideas can be found in his later works. At the age of twenty-three we find More lecturing on the philosophy of St. Augustine in Grocyn's church in London. In his fidelity to Plato himself, he went beyond any of his contemporaries; for we are told by Erasmus that "while still a youth, he attempted a dialogue in which he maintained a defence of Plato's community, even in the matter of wives."

This Platonism of More will no doubt be disputed by some. It will be said that, in some respects, he was a Thomist, an Aristotelian. Some commentators have called him—since he commended innocent pleasure—an Epicurean. But these, I think, are superficial judgments. Platonism does not exclude some aspects of Aristotelianism. Aristotle was, after all, a pupil of Plato, and Gemistus Pletho, the great mediator of Greek Platonism in the fifteenth century, was careful to insist on the area of agreement, as well as of dissent, between the two philosophers. The Florentine Platonists continued to embrace Aristotelian ideas, and their English disciples always expressed respect for Aristotle; it was only with the later revival and petrification of scholasticism that Aristotle became an enemy. More himself suffered some petrification too. As for Epicureanism, More only accepted it where it did not conflict with Platonism: that is, superficially. If the Utopians believed in the innocence of pleasure, it was certainly not on Epicurean premises. The two central doctrines of Epicurus—that the soul is mortal and that "the world runs by chance, governed by no divine providence"—are the only two beliefs which are positively punished, as "vile and base opinions," in More's ideal state.

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Once we recognize the profound influence of Plato on More we can understand (I believe) some other aspects of his character which puzzled contemporaries. For instance, there is his "Socratic" technique. For behind Plato stands Plato's own master, Socrates, and Plato's Socrates was a model for both Erasmus and More. Erasmus's prayer, "Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis," shocked the orthodox, and More was known as "our Christian Socrates." Both Erasmus and More used the Socratic method. They also used "Socratic irony," that disconcerting affectation of ignorance and simplicity which was Socrates' most effective dialectical weapon. And then there is the Socratic, or Platonic, raillery. That teasing wit, that gentle mockery, that vivid sense of the absurd which animate the writings of both Erasmus and More are in the Platonic tradition. The obvious example is Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae*, "the praise of Folly" inspired by and dedicated to More. Grave scholars were shocked by the frivolity of that work, but when they attacked it, More rushed to its defense. He gladly accepted Folly as his advocate, and he and his friends regularly played on his own name, *μωρός* the fool, "*oxymorus* or rather *μωρόσοφος*," as Guillaume Budé called him. The Utopians, More tells us, cherished fools. He himself kept a fool, Henry Patenson, who features in Holbein's family portrait. Even in his greatest work of devotion, his *Dialogue of Comfort*, written during his last imprisonment, he happily claimed to be "of nature even half a giglot and *more*." "I would," he added, "I could as easily mend my fault as I well know it, but scant can I refrain it, as old a fool as I am."

The comic spirit of Platonism is not often emphasized or perhaps even noticed by scholars, but in the nineteenth century Lord Macaulay recognized it. Plato, he remarked, was one of the greatest comic writers; and the most perceptive exponent of Platonism, Walter Pater, acknowledged it when he cited, as one of the greatest examples of the Platonic tradition in later Greek literature, the comic dialogues of the second-century satirist Lucian of Samosata. For this reason I do not find it in any way strange that More and Erasmus, with their friend William Lily, should practice their newly acquired Greek by translating, in 1505–1506, the works of Lucian; or that the Utopians, when they had learned Greek and acquired all the Greek classics, found particular delight in "Lucian's merry conceits and jests." On the face of it, Lucian should not have appealed to More, for he was an Epicurean philosopher who ridiculed all religion, including Christianity, and would afterward be condemned by the Church. But the Platonist tradition, which he too represented, could triumph over these differences.

More, then, was a Platonist, a committed Platonist in the Christian tradition of Florence, but also a real Platonist, a disciple of the pre-Christian Plato himself. To recognize this is, I believe, the beginning of

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wisdom in the matter. But what in fact is Platonism, and how was it interpreted by those who, in the fifteenth century, had revived it? Only if we answer this question, I believe, are we in a position to interpret More's thought.

Platonism, in one word, is idealism, the determination to identify the universal spirit which informs matter and, having identified it, to disengage it from the bewildering variety, the inert machinery, the practical compromises in which it is so often trapped and buried. In religion the Platonist seeks the animating spirit, and is impatient of theological discipline and mere ritual. In secular life also—if he interests himself in secular life—he seeks an ideal society which can preserve itself against corruption and, by a stable constitution, dispense with the sordid trivialities of day-to-day politics. The quest for such a spirit, the demand for such an ideal stability, arises most naturally in an age of hectic change, a time of apparent corruption, disintegration, decay.

Plato himself grew up in such a time. His youth coincided with a disastrous war, in which the greatness of his city was destroyed. In the wake of that disaster, he saw his revered master, Socrates, judicially murdered. He came to hate the society around him, and, hating it, he rebelled against those earlier philosophers who, in more stable times, had envisaged, without discomfort, a world of perpetual mobility. In his greatest political work, his *Republic*, he had imagined a form of society which, at whatever cost in freedom, would preserve itself forever, without change.

Platonism was thus essentially anti-historical, as it was also anti-theological. In religion it insisted on the immortality of the human soul and the divine guidance of the world. In politics it pursued the mirage of an ideal state, preserved alike against political corruption and historical change. Fortunately, perhaps, most Platonists did not go in for politics. They were artists, visionaries, mystics, saints, and their function was to illuminate, not to govern. But when they speculated in political matters, the result was always the same. Whatever their culture—whether ancient or modern, Eastern or Western, pagan, Christian, or Moslem—they invariably produced totalitarian systems, repellent to liberal men.

All this can be seen in More; indeed this is what separated More and Erasmus from their fellow humanists, from those whom we now call civic humanists. The civic humanists believed that antiquity, which they studied, offered an ideal of public spirit and that the highest duty of a scholar was to serve his city or his prince. The humanist court of Henry VIII attracted many such men, headed by Thomas Cromwell. But More, as a Platonist, never believed that political life was the ultimate good to be derived from classical learning. To him the world of the spirit came first, and ideally he would have kept out of politics altogether, as

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Erasmus always did, preferring poverty with scholarship and freedom to the golden servitude of court life. In fact he did not do so; and this is what makes him a more complex, a more mysterious, and in the end a more tragic figure than the undivided saint of European scholarship, Erasmus.

For in the end More rejected the life of scholarship as he rejected the life of the cloister. He studied the law. The law led to civic duties, Parliament, the royal service. In all these spheres of action, he discovered, and exercised, great practical abilities. He was a powerful lawyer, a formidable diplomat, a tough negotiator, secretive and strong willed—as his foreign rivals reported, "full of craft and subtlety" concealed "by smooth speech and calm expression in the English way." As the climax of his career, he would achieve the highest office of all, becoming Wolsey's successor as Lord Chancellor. That career was not achieved by mere saintliness. But always, beneath the surface, there was tension. Even at the height of his success, More's heart was elsewhere: in Plato's Academy, in the London Charterhouse, in Utopia. The secret hair shirt betokened that internal tension, the Epicurean facade concealed it, the public "fooleries" protected it. In 1505 his model was Pico della Mirandola who, though a great aristocrat, had fled from all "worldly business" and had ended as a devotee of the puritan friar Savonarola. In 1516, when he was called to office by the king, he publicly expressed his anxiety in the first book of *Utopia*. In 1522, when he was already high in office and no cloud could be seen on the horizon, he wrote his essay on "The Four Last Things" in which he likened civil life to a prison in which all worldly authority is "no better but one prisoner bearing a rule among the remnant, as the tapster doth in the Marshalsea." As Mr. James McConica says, "Nothing could be more at odds with the tone of common humanist opinion concerning the vocation to public service."

Divided souls have long agonies, but they also have moments of productive fusion. More's moment of fusion came in 1515, and its product was his greatest work, *Utopia*. For four centuries men have argued about the meaning of that work, and at the end there is still no agreement about it. It is as mysterious as More himself; to it, as to him, we agree only in ascribing the indefinable quality of greatness. Some have seen *Utopia* as an expression of nostalgia for medieval traditionalism; others as a blueprint for modern socialism, or even for modern imperialism; others, like More himself (but we must remember his Socratic irony), as a mere *ludibrium*, a jeu d'esprit, a holiday exercise. I believe that, to understand it, we should set it in the context of his mind—a mind which was (I have suggested) fundamentally Platonic. Like Plato's *Republic*, like every expression of Platonic philosophy in politics from Plato to Marx, it is an attempt to escape from history, an

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attempt to freeze historical change, to fix a society, whose ordinary course is seen as disintegration and corruption, in an ideal mold: a mold which, by the very terms of its existence, is, and must be, repellent to liberal men.

Consider the circumstances in which More wrote *Utopia*. In 1515 he had been engaged for some two years on a work of history. His subject was the tyrannous reign of Richard III. More had heard a great deal about the tyranny of Richard III when he had served in the household of Cardinal Morton, who had suffered from it, and he had evidently thought much about it. "Formerly he disliked the court and the company of princes," says Erasmus, "because he always had a peculiar hatred of tyranny and love of equality." He had written, and had invited Erasmus to write, a reply to Lucian's dialogue on tyrannicide. The tyranny of Richard III, vividly described by Morton, was therefore, to him, an illustration of a general problem. From that particular tyranny England had been saved by the victory of Henry VII at Bosworth Field and the coming of the Tudor dynasty. But of course a mere change of dynasty was no guarantee for the future. Nor could it solve the general problem. How, More asked, could tyranny be permanently excluded from a society? How could equality be made perfect and lasting?

While he was reflecting on these problems, he was sent by Henry VIII on a commercial embassy to the Netherlands. The journey interrupted his particular historical work. Away from his documents, he could not continue it. He laid it aside, and in fact would never complete it. On the other hand, the general problem remained in his mind. Moreover, in the Netherlands he had time on his hands. He stayed in Antwerp with a friend to whom Erasmus had recommended him, Pieter Gillis, the town clerk, a humanist scholar who became his close friend. He also saw there a new form of government, a federation of city-states. The problem of tyranny, how to secure equality against the historical forces which destroyed it; the friendship and conversation of Gillis; the sight of the city republics of the Netherlands—all these met in his mind. But the force which drew out of them the ideal republic of *Utopia* was the Platonism which was already there: that unhistorical, anti-historical idealism which, in politics, has always led to blueprints for totalitarian rule.

More was not himself unhistorical. His *Richard III* shows that he read the ancient historians with care. But history to him, as to the humanists in general, was not a constructive science; it was a storehouse of moral examples, some good, most bad. He did not seek, in past history, a means of controlling the future; he looked to philosophy for a means to end history, to end it altogether. Like Plato, like Marx, like Pico's hero Savonarola, who in his own time had sought to stay the

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ferment of Renaissance Florence by means of an intolerant puritan republic, or like that other Dominican friar, Tommaso Campanella, who a century later would seek to pickle all Christendom in a millenarian theocracy, More sought a social form which would protect society against historical change: that is, against history itself. His island of Utopia had no history. Since the time when King Utopus imposed his constitution, seventeen hundred years before, nothing had happened there, and nothing would happen in the future, for the Utopians "had laid such foundations for their state as shall continue and last not only happily but also, as far as man's wit may judge and conjecture, endure for ever." And a Dutch admirer, on reading *Utopia*, wrote to More that if only the cities of antiquity had adopted such a system, they would still be flourishing today.

More's *Utopia* was the crystallization of his Platonic ideas, their logical application to politics. Perhaps it was only a *ludibrium*, a holiday task, but that does not make it frivolous. What comes off the top of a man's mind is often what has fermented at the bottom of it. The book at once became famous, and it made its author famous too. But perhaps it is worthwhile to particularize his fame. We shall find that, once again, it is within a narrow Platonic world, a world that was soon to evaporate, or to be transformed.

Seven years after the publication of *Utopia*, its fame excited an old man living in Padua, Nicolas Leonicus. Leonicus was a distinguished Platonist who had once taught the Greek language and Greek philosophy to More's old tutor, Thomas Linacre, and to his contemporary, William Latimer. He was now teaching a pupil of his pupils, King Henry VIII's young kinsman, Reginald Pole, afterward cardinal of England. Leonicus wrote to More, who was a stranger to him, presenting a tributary book and asking, in return, for a copy of *Utopia*. A copy was duly brought out to him by More's protégé John Clement, who happened to be visiting Italy. Leonicus was delighted with it, and wrote enthusiastically about it to his young pupil, Pole. Pole no doubt read it, for he too was a Platonist. A few years later, Pole was in England and there met the rising minister of Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell. To him too he sang the praises of Platonism and Plato's *Republic*. However, the minister was not impressed. Plato, he said, was now *vieux jeu;* and he countered Pole by praising a more up-to-date work of political philosophy which was circulating briskly in manuscript: Machiavelli's *Prince*. Pole (according to his own later account) was very shocked. That work, he said, was written by the finger of Satan. Machiavelli, of course, had no use for Plato, or ideal commonwealths. He did not wish to end history. He wished to understand it, and to use it; and Cromwell, as he was soon to show, followed him.

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Thomas Cromwell's famous discussion with Pole took place in 1530. By that time More was Lord Chancellor of England, but already his whole intellectual world was crumbling. In 1515–16, the year of *Utopia*, he had appeared as the heir, the most brilliant and most attractive exponent, of a long tradition: the tradition of Florentine Platonism associated, through him and Erasmus, with a respiritualized, reformed, ecumenical Christianity—what Erasmus called "the philosophy of Christ." But less than two years later, in 1517, the fatal blow had been struck. Or rather, the stone was loosed which brought the enchanted castle down.

We all know who struck that blow, who loosed that stone. In 1517 Martin Luther, following the innocent example of Pico della Mirandola himself, posted his challenging theses in his local church. As Erasmus foresaw, that frontal challenge, and the frontal resistance of the established Church, split the unity of Christendom; and neither Erasmus, by refusing the challenge, nor More, by accepting it, could save that unity. It was broken for centuries, perhaps forever.

However, it was not only the unity of Christendom that foundered in those years. Less spectacularly, but no less finally, the new Platonic synthesis, which had given its last glow to that unity, was also being undermined. It was undermined in philosophy by the revived scholasticism of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and it was undermined in politics by Machiavelli and his disciples.

Machiavelli too had been nurtured in Florence on Florentine ideals. He too had immersed himself in the writers of antiquity. But the lessons which he derived from those writers were not Platonic. They were the lessons of history, that "reason of state" from which the idealists of all ages have sought to escape but from which there is no escape. Platonism was not killed by the Reformation or by Machiavelli. But it was transformed. The Platonism of Plato himself, which was the Platonism of More and Erasmus, gave way to the Hermetic, Kabbalistic, magical Platonism of Reuchlin and Agrippa, Cardano, Dee, and Bruno, the conjuring with demons and spirits, planets and stars. This magical Platonism was not a new development. It had roots in the later work of Plato; it had been fed by the Hermetic writings of the Roman Empire; it had been forwarded by Ficino and Pico. But Erasmus and More had no sympathy with it. In this, as in so much else, their minds were pure.

With the dissolution of More's intellectual world, there was dissolved also the spirit which had animated it, the spirit of confidence, gaiety, good-humored raillery, and love of life. As Marie Delcourt has written, the ideological tempest of the 1520s would carry away both the great hopes of the previous generation and the bold and genial spirit behind them. "Neither the *Praise of Folly* nor *Utopia* could have been written

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after 1520. Thereafter, only Rabelais would triumph over the intellectual depression which had settled upon Europe." Rabelais, we may remark, was the avowed disciple of Erasmus, "to whom I owe (as he wrote) *quicquid sum et valeo,* all that I am, all that I am worth"; and he borrowed some of his ideas openly from the *Utopia* of Thomas More.

In the new age marked by the division of Christendom after 1520, Erasmus fared better than More. The Platonic "philosophy of Christ" might have foundered, but Erasmus's scholarship and his implicit heresy—his rationality, his unflinching textual criticism, his skepticism—continued to keep his ideas alive; he looked forward to the scholars and thinkers of the next century. The work of More lacked these preservative ingredients, and so it dissolved, leaving only the indefinable quality of saintliness and the fact of martyrdom. *Utopia,* that Platonic political ideal, with its uncomfortable social criticism and radical formula of stability, was disowned. After the Peasants' Revolt in Germany, it won no support in Europe. Only a few Spanish clergy dreamed of applying that idealist blueprint to the unresisting conquered society of America, as Oliver Cromwell would afterward dream of applying the equally Utopian schemes of his followers to the "blank paper" of conquered Ireland. But their voices were not heard in Europe. There the book continued to be read as an agreeable fantasy, but in the political philosophy of the time it marks a dead end.

As for More himself, from 1522 onward he became a mere religious controversialist. In many ways, as he saw the need to fight for his ideas, he silently denied some of them. After his martyrdom he shrank into a provincial saint, cultivated only in a dwindling family circle. In England, outside the family, he was hardly mentioned, and the biographies which that family wrote or inspired remained unpublished. Ironically, it was in Spain and Portugal—the countries in which the name of Erasmus was most ruthlessly blotted out—that the name of More was most warmly cherished. But it was cherished only as a symbol: More was seen as the critic and the victim of Protestant England and its heretical Tudor dynasty. So in Spain and Portugal and the Spanish Netherlands his name was revered but his books were not read. The greatest of them, *Utopia,* was on the Index.

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They Were Dancing

PHILIP MURRAY

"You told the truth but used it like a lie. . ."
Dionysus in Euripides' *The Bacchae*
Sutherland Translation

With this long, light, rusted, gimcrack knife
The defendant stabbed his landsman fifteen times.
The deepest wounds are in the victim's neck and heart;
There are also cuts upon his hands between the fingers;
He had tried feebly, drunkenly to defend himself
In the vestibule of the wrong apartment house
One block from his own, before locked inner doors.

The quarrel began in a bar and continued outside;
The deceased had pawed the thigh of the defendant's girl
While they were dancing. The defendant is quoted as saying
In Spanish, "I am going to kill this one."
A witness saw them both enter the apartment lobby;
Only the defendant came out; his black and white
Checkered trousers were blotched with bloody stains.

Arrested minutes later near the scene of the crime,
He spoke no English and pleaded innocent.
The knife was recovered from a curbside garbage can.
We are assembled here to try this man,
Examining evidence, weighing testimony
In two languages, determining beyond
Reasonable doubt, his innocence or guilt.

A single witness testifies for the defense,
An island friend who speaks no English and answers

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Every question with the same reply—they were dancing.
Did you see the defendant with a knife?
They were dancing. Interpreter: He says they were dancing.
Was the defendant drinking? They were dancing.
Interpreter: He says they were dancing. They were dancing.

All that remains is the epiphany of the god,
And it comes, as I handle the murderer's knife;
A giant fierce bull-mask of Dionysus
Floats over the defendant's head, serpents writhe
About the horns, flicking their tongues, hissing.
A frenzied roaring stuns the defendant's ears;
The man is about to burst into violent flames.

His sensual bronze lips twitch exultantly;
His mind is incandescent with the message
Of the mad god born of the thigh of Zeus.
Impassioned memories break like a flash fire.
I myself am about to cry "*Euge*, Euripides!"
None of my colleagues seem to notice.
I pass the knife to the juror on my left.

✪ PHILIP MURRAY's work has appeared in *Poetry, Paris Review*, and the *Michigan Quarterly*.

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Shopping at the Palace

D. J. Enright

In the Snow Queen's Palace
Your heart shall find its fantasies.
Untouchables are tangible—

Talents and potencies
Poems and women
And delights more subtle
—Not that we mean such things are crude
We make it plain, that he who runs may read.

Here you will meet
Those long-conserved velleities
And each deep-frozen aspiration.
Nothing here goes bad
Not even evil, not damnation.

Just point to what you want.
Is frostbite in your fingers
In your extremities?
The Queen esteems cold light
There are no dark crannies.

Veiled avidities shining from showcases
Great music heaped like hundreds and thousands

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Silvery fish to whisper of riches
The breasts for your pulsing hands to caress
For your rivals' eyes the final pennies.

So there is numbness in your fingers
In your extremities?—
Such are the Queen's amenities.

We make it plain
That he who reads may run straight home again.
There was ice enough in your heart already
One wintry splinter a sufficient spring
For your scant fancy.

D. J. ENRIGHT has published a number of books of poetry. His most recent book is a novel for children entitled *The Joke Shop*.

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Why Read the Great 19th-Century Historians?

JOHN CLIVE

A SHORT ANSWER TO THE QUESTION POSED BY MY TITLE might be: "Because they wrote well; because they may be said to have reinterpreted aspects of the past in fundamental ways; because they saw themselves as prophets as well as historians, firmly believing that their role carried with it the obligation to say what they thought about the society and politics of the present and the future as well as of the past; because they usually said this with a confidence made evident in the cadence of their prose; because, along with the specific view of that segment of the past with which each of them was concerned, they also communicated a general view of the world." But a short answer of this sort calls for qualification and elaboration.

Style alone will not insure the durability of historical works. Great history can indeed be great literature at the same time—one need do no more than mention the name of Gibbon. But, as V. S. Pritchett has put it, unlike the novelist and the poet, the historian can never be the absolute ruler of an imaginary kingdom. For, however skillful he may be, he cannot invent his facts. That is why some critics—most recently a number of structuralists—seem to me to be on the wrong track when they treat historians and histories primarily as employers and examples of literary forms. The old battle against those who wished to make history a science has been fought and won. A new battle may be shaping up, against those who wish to make it into pure literature. If one does not, then, return to the great historians for their literary artistry alone, does one do so mainly for their message, their philosophy, their weltanschauung? Here I think Geoffrey Elton is right when he warns against reducing the historian's function in society to that of a preacher. To be sure, that was a role many of them assumed in the nineteenth century. But while by no means unconnected with their survival, that role alone does not seem to me their sole claim to durability. Finally, what of innovations and new approaches to old subjects? Those certainly supply

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one motive for a reader's return to the great historians—to observe and admire once again how they were able to reinterpret historical events, institutions, and personalities from a new angle or from a fresh point of view. But innovations and new points of view are soon absorbed into the canon of historical knowledge, and usually superseded within not too long a period of time. One does not, in the first instance, turn to Carlyle or Michelet for light on the French Revolution, or to Macaulay for the latest word on Restoration politics.

Why, then, are the great nineteenth-century historians still worth reading? Or are they? The only way to find out is to reread them, if possible with a minimum of preconceptions and anticipations. Thus, what follows is an account of what struck me most forcibly in the course of a recent rereading of five great works of history: a very brief report on four of them—Marx's *18th Brumaire,* Tocqueville's *Old Régime,* Carlyle's *French Revolution,* and Burckhardt's *Renaissance*—and a somewhat lengthier report on the fifth: Macaulay's *History of England.* Inevitably I am recording a personal reaction. Other readers will no doubt react very differently, and that is as it should be. For part of the continuing power of masterpieces, in history as well as in other arts, resides in the variegated nature of their appeal.

The detailed sequence of events that led to Louis Napoléon's coup d'etat in 1851 is so complex, and demands such a degree of familiarity with a plethora of groups, factions, and individuals, that I am bound to confess that a good many rereadings of Marx's *18th Brumaire* still leave me, to some extent, puzzled and perplexed. However, what I do find more gripping and effective with each reading is the masterful manner in which Marx reinforces his initial epigram, derived in part from Hegel: all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur twice, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Having begun with this image from the world of the theater, he continues throughout his brilliant essay to come back time and again, in a variety of ways, to the contrast between the world of reality—the class struggle in France—and that realm of shadow and illusion in which the actors fancy that their posturings and speeches make a difference to the process of history. Edmund Wilson, in *To the Finland Station,* has memorably described the intellectual excitement felt by the reader as he follows Marx in penetrating to the class interests actually involved in the shaping of historical events. But worth adding, perhaps, is that what sustains that excitement is a marvelously skillful use of language and imagery. Specters walk about; masquerades are performed; curtains are drawn; cardsharpers do their conjuring tricks; objects change their shape—shoulders turn into bayonets, veils into iron masks, eagles into vultures; night watchmen are unable to see; canes fail to stop rapiers; bubbles are

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pricked; actors come offstage to don their workaday clothes behind the scenes; people get lost in blind alleys; marionettes and dummies entertain; ostriches hide their heads in the sand. And, everywhere, shadows and ghosts and dreams and riddles abound, while Marx, the puppet master, puts his creatures through their paces.

What I have described is Marx's literary skill. He loved Shakespeare and the drama, and was thus perhaps particularly drawn to the imagery of illusion. But the spellbinding power of the imagery is directly related to the spell-banishing power of the historian. Marx's metaphors and similes exert such great effect because they reflect and reinforce his conviction that the realities of class and economic forces underlie a make-believe world of paper slogans and ideological foam.

What draws one back to the *18th Brumaire* is, at least to some degree, its literary quality. What draws one back to Tocqueville's *Old Régime* is something quite different—not, at least for this reader, its famous thesis about the continuity of centralization in French history, but rather something that one might call its unique conjunction of mystery and mordancy. On the one hand, Tocqueville, by his own description, is the anatomist who dissects the body politic in search of its laws of life. But, curiously enough, what seems most moving and instructive about his book is not its author's pioneering use of the methods of historical sociology, but the sense that the ultimate currents running deep below the surface of the lives of states and societies will not yield to scientific analysis, but will remain forever mysterious. In all human institutions, as in the human body, Tocqueville notes, "there is a hidden source of energy, the life principle itself, independent of the organs which perform the various functions needed for survival; once this vital flame burns low, the whole organism languishes and wastes away, and though the organs seem to function as before, they serve no useful purpose." It is not that Tocqueville begins by throwing up his hands in the face of what he calls "the slow persistent action of our institutions," or the seemingly ineluctable manner in which the "id" of equality tends so often to defeat the "ego" of freedom. On the contrary. Rarely has any historian applied his mind more vigorously to the detection of those ultimate forces. But he leaves us with the sense that, in the end, the body politic, like the human body, possesses mysteries it will not yield up. At the same time he displays a very unmystical awareness of the shortcomings of the France of his own day, of a time marked by "discreet, well-regulated sensualism," a time when a man no longer, as in the old days, pays hard cash for an official post, but goes one better and sells himself; a time, like previous times in history, when those who destroy men's freedom begin by trying to retain its forms. For me the power of the *Old Régime* lies in its tone of voice—the combination of the historian

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who recognizes the limits of the sociological, the scientific approach to history, even as he pioneers its use, and the patriotic and freedom-loving Frenchman, the author of *Democracy in America,* who is never less than frank about the fact that it is his disillusionment with, and his fears for, the future of the society of his own time that have helped both to inspire and to direct his quest for the laws of political and social life.

It may sound paradoxical to call a clearheaded analytical historian rereadable because he communicates a sense of mystery, while calling a mystically inclined narrative historian rereadable because he constantly directs attention to one of the unsolved technical problems of writing any sort of history, narrative or analytical. But that is what I have done and am about to do. Rereading Carlyle can be a daunting task, especially when it involves works of such monstrous size as *Frederick the Great.* But the *French Revolution* is another story. Even here one may tire of the style, one may bridle at the philosophy. But one cannot help being captivated by Carlyle's attempts to put to the test of actual historical writing the dictum in his essay "On History" (1830): "Narrative is *linear,* Action is *solid.*" Again and again Carlyle tries to capture the flow of historical action in time by crowding into his paragraphs contemporaneous happenings; some feeling about the lives of the participants before and after as well as during those events; a sense of place in historical as well as geographical terms; and, with all that, the truth that, however dramatic and violent the events he is describing, ordinary life goes on: people eat and work and love and hate, the sun rises, the earth revolves. It seems to me that whether or not he always succeeds in meeting it, Carlyle continually tries to face the challenge of reproducing both the solid texture and the continual ebb and flow of the past. It is, of course, an impossibly difficult challenge. But historians today are still trying to meet it. For me, watching Carlyle's heroic attempts to do so is the chief reward for returning to his historical writings. What it is important to remember is that for Carlyle this way of writing history was far from merely a technical device. It formed, rather, an integral part of some of his most deeply held beliefs: earthly time as the mere vesture of eternal time; time perpetually rushing on, the mysterious River of Existence; time's dominion over us, a destiny whose edicts of oblivion could only be revoked by books like Boswell's *Johnson*—"a little row of Naphtha-lamps, with its line of Naphtha-light, burn[ing] clear and holy through the dead Night of the Past."

I suppose that some specialists in the history of early modern Europe still approach Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* with a view to testing, questioning, or endorsing his thesis about the birth of individualism in the Italian city-states of the fifteenth century. For other readers—and, of course, I speak only for myself here—the continuing

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greatness of Burckhardt's work lies in a different sphere. No other historian raised so forcefully the problem of the inevitable intermixture of good and evil in history, the problem he defines when he comes to judge the morality of the Italian people during the period he has dealt with: "The ultimate truth with respect to the character, the conscience, and the guilt of a people remains forever a secret; if only for the reason that its defects have another side, where they appear as peculiarities or even as virtues." Good and evil, Burckhardt writes, lay strangely mixed in fifteenth-century Italy. Ambition, self-assertion, the quest for fame, the pursuit of greatness—all modern qualities, for the modern Italian spirit was destined to serve as model and ideal for the entire Western world—may be praised as "good." But, on the other hand, "the curtain is now and then drawn aside, and we see with frightful evidence a boundless ambition and thirst after greatness, independent of all means and consequences." The question Burckhardt raises so insistently is whether it is possible for one set of qualities to exist without the other, in view of his conclusion that excessive individualism, the fundamental vice of the Italian character, was at the same time a condition of its greatness. The immorality of that age might well make one shudder. But the most ferocious internecine battles in Perugia supplied the young Raphael with impressions he later made use of in some of his greatest paintings, and Lodovico il Moro—who, as the perfect type of despot of the age, "almost disarms our moral judgment"—attracted Leonardo to his court. We know that Burckhardt regarded his own time as one lacking in spontaneity and increasingly marked by mediocrity, materialism, and philistinism. Even the sense of "honor" that in the Renaissance had provided the strongest bulwark against evil seemed to be losing its power. Given that apparently unique conjunction of national spirit with antiquity which had constituted the Italian revival, was another Renaissance possible? And even if it was, was the moral price worth paying? For Burckhardt, these were intensely personal questions.

One thing emerges, then, from a rereading of Marx, Tocqueville, Carlyle, and Burckhardt—that the quality of their writing, which turns out to exert the greatest power over us (and that may be an unexpected quality), is intimately related to each historian's chief intellectual or personal concerns. It is never merely stylistic, merely methodological, or merely didactic. Marx's use of literary devices reflected his view of history as class struggle; Tocqueville's quest for the laws of social life derived in great part from his French and American political experience; Carlyle's obsession with a new method of writing history was closely related to his metaphysics; Burckhardt's view of the moral ambivalence to be found in fifteenth-century Italy was colored by his own pessimism about the fate of nineteenth-century Europe.

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What of Macaulay, the historian with whom, having written an account of his early life, I was most familiar when I began rereading? In the *History of England* I certainly encountered once again those qualities that even his most severe critics have granted him: his narrative skill, more especially his mastery of transitions; the clarity of his style, which enables him to make even unpromising subjects, such as the founding of the Bank of England or the recoinage, palatable to the inexpert reader; his sense of the human drama of history that emerges in particular in his great set pieces, such as the siege of Londonderry or the landing of William; his feeling for local color and his use of popular and ephemeral literature as source material; his pioneering survey of English society in 1685 in his third chapter; his well-nigh infallible judgment of the various alternatives presented by important political and constitutional situations—something that S. R. Gardiner singled out as Macaulay's greatest achievement as a historian. At the same time, I was struck by other, less attractive qualities: his tendency to view historical characters one-dimensionally, as heroes or villains; the unquestioning solidity of his belief in progress, which makes him conjure up, often with gratuitous frequency and with possibly excessive satisfaction, the wonders of peeping villas, gay shrubberies, and busy streets and shops; his apparent conviction, recently much questioned, that the Revolution of 1688 was a foreordained happy event bringing only beneficial effects in its train; his strong biases and prejudices, by no means always on the Whig side; his schoolmasterly and frequently simplistic moral judgments; his occasional tendency to slip from drama into melodrama; and, finally, his habit of too readily intruding himself into his *History*. One may not entirely agree with Lord Acton that "the business of historians is to get out of the way, and, like the man who plays Punch, to concentrate attention on their personages." But one must certainly agree when he says that no one did this less than did Macaulay.

What struck me most forcibly in a recent rereading of Macaulay's *History* was how much of it had little or nothing to do with any of the things I have just mentioned, but was centered around public opinion, public feelings, what Macaulay liked to call the public mind. One need do no more than plunge into the second chapter (the first having transported the reader rapidly from the Romans to the Restoration) in order to verify this emphasis—quite apart from the fact that the words "feeling" and "public mind" occur no less than thirty-five times in its course. Cromwell's military tyranny "had left deep and enduring traces in the public mind"; hostile "feelings" about a standing army were stronger among the Cavaliers than among the Roundheads; the "feelings" of the Cavaliers about indemnities and royal favors differed from those of the Roundheads; it was "generally felt" that the certificates issued to holders

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of benefices by Cromwell's triers saved the country from being overrun by ignorant and drunken reprobates; the "feelings" of those royalists who had loved the Church because she was the enemy of their enemies were blamable but not wholly inexcusable; the Puritan opposition to bearbaiting had nothing to do with the humane "feelings" of the nineteenth century: the Puritan "hated bearbaiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." Quakers were "popularly regarded" as the most despicable of fanatics, and wrongly confounded by the public with the Puritans—whatever was ridiculous or odious in either increased the scorn and aversion which the multitude "felt" for both. In any event, the theology, the manners, the dialect of the Puritan were associated "in the public mind" with the darkest and meanest vices. But after the court showed the extent to which it abused its victory, by its cruel treatment of the nonconformists, they became objects of pity and respect to well-constituted "minds," and these "feelings" became stronger when it was noised abroad that the court was less severe with Papists than with Presbyterians. The "minds of men" were now in such a "temper" that every public act "excited discontent." There were "murmurs" about Charles's marriage to Catherine. "General indignation" followed the sale of Dunkirk, and "public discontent" resulted from the retention of Tangiers. But the "murmurs" excited by those events were faint when compared with the "clamors" that soon broke out. Hyde's fall in some degree took the edge off "the public appetite for revenge." But "public feeling" was alarmed by the growing power of France. Between the "public mind" of England and the "public mind" of France, there was a great gulf. As for the Country party's views of France, it was riven by "two strong feelings" in opposite directions. By 1678 "the public mind" was once again in the state it had been in when the Long Parliament met. Historical memories, the Gunpowder Plot above all, had left "in the minds of the vulgar a deep and bitter feeling." Juries partook of "the feelings then common throughout the nation," and were encouraged by the church to indulge "these feelings." I shall cite no further examples from this chapter—lest I expose myself to what Macaulay himself considered the only important criticism he heard of his *History*: repetitiousness—*except* to note that toward the end of the chapter he calls May 26, 1679, the day Charles prorogued parliament, a great one in British history, not only because on that day the Habeas Corpus Act received the royal assent, but because the Licensing Act expired with the royal dismissal of the two houses.

It was characteristic of Macaulay that he should attach so much significance to this event. He was certainly one of the first to have been fully cognizant of the importance of news and its dissemination as a subject for the political and social historian. Here was one of those

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"noiseless revolutions" which previous historians had all but ignored and to which Macaulay delighted in drawing attention. In fact, of course, it was a noiseless revolution that produced quite a lot of noise. One need only recollect those memorable passages in the third chapter in which Macaulay first brings to life Whitehall as the chief staple of news and rumors—"Had Halifax got the better of Rochester?" "Was the Duke of York really going to Scotland?" "Had Monmouth really been sent for to the Hague?"—and then goes on to describe in detail the function of coffeehouses as the chief means by which London public opinion found an outlet. In 1685 nothing like a daily national newspaper existed. The provinces were dependent on newsletters from London, the product of news writers who "rambled from coffee room to coffee room collecting reports, squeezed [themselves] into the Sessions House at the Old Bailey, if there was an interesting trial, nay, perhaps obtained admission to the gallery of Whitehall, and noticed how the king and duke looked." The Licensing Act, renewed in 1685, expired once again in 1693 and was duly renewed—"not however without an opposition, which . . . proved that the public mind was beginning dimly to perceive how closely civil freedom and freedom of conscience are connected with freedom of discussion." Macaulay goes on to comment that no preceding writer had thought it worthwhile to expend care or labor on the history of that act. "Yet," he continues, "surely the events which led to the establishment of the liberty of the press in England, and in all the countries peopled by the English race, may be thought to have as much interest for the present generation as any of those battles and sieges of which the most minute details have been carefully recorded."

Macaulay pays due attention first to the history of licensing and then to the appearance of newspapers in London in 1695—a "great experiment," a "great revolution," something "which no preceding historian had condescended to mention but which [was] of far greater importance than the achievements of William's army or of Russell's fleet." But his interest in the public mind went far beyond an interest in the formal or informal means of communication: newspapers, gazettes, broadsides, pamphlets, coffeehouses. Like his fellow Victorians, he was persuaded of the importance of rational argument in forming opinions—a persuasion that found expression in the *History*, not only in those abstracts of parliamentary debates which he himself called "a new, and, I hope, a striking feature in the book," but also in the technical device he invented as a modern substitute for the ancient historians' "speeches": the "declamatory disquisition" in which he summarized, in indirect discourse, arguments that would have been brought forward and questions that would have been raised about important issues by various groups, parties, and factions in church and state. The historian's task was to show

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what people thought and how people felt, to depict the pride and prejudice of the English country squire, to point out the difference in attitude and mental habits between the Roman Catholic courtier and the Roman Catholic country gentleman, to describe the feelings of those exiled Whigs who, toward the end of Charles II's reign, had sought asylum in the Low Countries.

For the historian who wished to do this, squibs and ballads were just as important as more formal and official sources. In 1688, as Macaulay points out, "public feeling" did not manifest itself by large meetings and vehement harangues. But it found a vent through satirical ballads like "Lillibullero," whose success, to be sure, was "the effect, and not the cause, of that excited state of public feeling which produced the revolution." Legends and rumors were equally grist for the historian's mill. After all, such was the devotion of the people to Monmouth, for instance, that "in the face of the strongest evidence of which the fact of a death was ever verified, many continued to hope he was still alive and would again appear in arms." And it was "a whisper which swelled fast into a fearful clamor," to the effect that the Irish were marching on London and massacring every man, woman, and child on the road that (at the end of 1688) set off "Irish night" in London, "the strangest and most terrible that England had ever seen."

An attempt to represent the thoughts and feelings of various groups and classes at times of crisis seems to me to lie at the heart of Macaulay's historical endeavor, and may well be what he had in mind when he noted in his journal in December 1849: "There is merit, no doubt, in Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon. Yet it is not the thing. I have a conception of history more just, I am confident, than theirs." His narrative technique in the *History* was closely tied to that conception:

> Wise men began to perceive that
> It was even whispered that
> It was remarked that
> Those who remembered
> It was observed that
> The traveler saw that
> Nor did men omit to remark
> It was apprehended that

Time and again the reader receives the impression—as was, of course, Macaulay's intention—that various views and feelings about events reach him directly from historical spectators, observers, and participants. The public mind itself is heard to speak.

And the state of that public mind was crucial. In 1686 William was aware, quite correctly, that "the public mind of England, though heated

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by grievances, was by no means ripe for revolution." Two years later, the prosecution of the bishops and the birth of the Prince of Wales had produced that "great revolution in the feelings of many Tories" which helped to bring success to William's cause. But did Macaulay regard his task as chronicler of feeling and opinion as merely descriptive? After all, the question arises at once as to the nature of the dynamic factors that cause changes and revolutions in public opinion and in the feelings of various groups in the nation. Here one must beware of making too large a claim for him. But two things may be said, beyond reiterating his general belief that out of the clash of opposing opinions, truth and progress were bound irresistibly to emerge. One is to remind ourselves of his conviction that "the history of England during the seventeenth century is the history of the transformation of a limited monarchy, constituted after the fashion of the middle ages, into a limited monarchy suited to that more advanced state of society in which the public defense can no longer be intrusted to a feudal militia." A more advanced state of society inevitably brought with it more advanced views and opinions. The other thing worth recalling is Macaulay's habitual linkage of feelings to situation. Why were Presbyterian ministers not unanimous in wishing for the passage of a Comprehension Bill in 1689? Because, since the Declaration of Indulgence, the "situation" of the ablest and most eloquent preachers was "such as the great majority of the divines of the Established Church might well envy." Why were the politicians of the Restoration period generally corrupt and unprincipled by nineteenth-century standards? Because their characters had been formed amid frequent and violent revolutions and counterrevolutions. "Their situation naturally developed in them to the highest degree a peculiar class of abilities and a peculiar mass of vices." Why did the Country party in the 1670s on the one hand call for a war against France but, as soon as recruiting commenced, refuse supplies? Because they were "in the embarrassing situation of subjects who have reason to believe that their prince is conspiring with a foreign and hostile power against their liberties." To give him military resources might only be to arm him against the state. Why did the Tories in 1691 take the view that laws against treason should provide legal privileges for the accused? Because "in the days when none but Roundheads and Nonconformists were accused of treason, even the most humane and upright Cavaliers were disposed to think that the laws which were the safeguard of the throne could hardly be too severe. But, as soon as loyal Tory gentlemen and venerable fathers of the Church were in danger of being called in question for corresponding with St. Germains, a new light flashed on many understandings which had been unable to discover the smallest injustice in the proceedings against Algernon Sidney or Alice Lisle."

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Macaulay was certainly not the first historian to have noticed the relationship between people's circumstances and their thoughts and feelings, or to have conceived of the ineluctable progress of society as taking place by stages. One need only mention Montesquieu and Gibbon as preceding him in the first endeavor and the Scottish historical school as preceding him in the second. But, as Professor Trevor-Roper has pointed out, Macaulay went beyond Hume in showing that the progress of society was not distinct from politics, but connected with it, because it could be fostered by enlightened, liberal, and rational reform. Such reform, I would add, could only be accomplished when the public mind demanded and endorsed it, when the feelings and opinions of the nation at large were attuned to it.

That phrase, "the nation at large," should be regarded in the context of Macaulay's general views about society. Within his limits, Macaulay was indeed a pioneering historian of the public mind. But the limits were there. He remained the Whig of 1832 whose great fear, then and throughout his life, was that, as he put it in his account of Irish night in London, "the human vermin which, neglected by ministers of state and ministers of religion, barbarous in the midst of civilization, heathen in the midst of Christianity, burrows among all physical and all moral pollution, in the cellars and garrets of great cities, will at once rise into terrible importance."

Eighteen thirty-two, in fact, is more than a measure of Macaulay's limits as a social historian. To my mind it provides the answer to the question that remains to be asked: If the secret of the continuing survival of Marx, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Carlyle lies mainly in the intimate connection that exists between those features of their historical writing which most powerfully attract us as readers and their own most deeply held feelings about the world and their place in it, is Macaulay's "public mind in history" related to his innermost preoccupations, and if so, how? For the answer to that question we must look back from Macaulay the historian to Macaulay the politician. In 1828 he had ended his essay on Hallam's *Constitutional History* by stressing what he called "the revolution of public feeling" which had led to general dissatisfaction with the state of the representation in England. He who, not so many years later, was himself to play a major role in instituting freedom of the press in India, now pointed out that "the gallery in which the reporters sit [in parliament] [had] become a fourth estate of the realm." (He was, by the way, the first to have applied that term to the press in general.) But at a time when public opinion had become more important than it ever was, the House of Commons was "far from being an express image of the general feeling. . . . Instead of outrunning the public mind, as before the Revolution it frequently did, it now follows

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with slow steps and at a wide distance." Reform was necessary. As we know, Macaulay's own speeches played some part in bringing it about. And it is in those speeches that we find him, again and again, involving the public mind and public feelings as crucial determining factors:

March 2, 1831: "Who flatters himself how he can turn this feeling back?"

July 5, 1831: "Woe to the Government which thinks that a great, a steady, a long continued movement of the public mind is to be stopped like a street riot!"

September 20, 1831: Public feeling about reform commenced far back in British history. During the last seventy years that feeling has had a great influence on "the public mind."

October 10, 1831: There are only two ways in which societies can normally be governed—by "public opinion" and by the sword. The law is nothing but a piece of paper printed by the king's printer, with the king's arms at the top, "till 'public opinion' breathes the breath of life into the dead letter."

December 16, 1831: There had been no change in the government for the worse but, rather, a change in the "public mind" which produced exactly the same effect that would be produced by a change in the government for the worse. "Agitations of the public mind, so deep and so long continued as those which we have witnessed, do not end in nothing."

It was no accident, then, that in the *History* Macaulay occupied himself to the extent that he did with the formation and influence on affairs of state of what he called the "public mind." The *History* has often been called politically biased in various Whiggish ways. There is some of that, though less than one might expect. If one is going to make a case for the political coloring of the *History,* then, it appears to me, that case must be made in the terms I have set out. Having celebrated the power of the public mind as the major factor in the greatest political battle of his generation—a battle which also marked the scene of his greatest personal triumph—Macaulay made its study and exploration a paramount theme of his *History.* It is in great part because preoccupation with the "public mind" had been and remained so vital a part of his personal and political concerns that when he came to focus on it as a historian, he produced history not merely original but readable beyond its own time. He and the other great nineteenth-century historians are still worth reading because we can still feel the powerful impact of that encounter between personal commitment and scholarly curiosity which lies at the heart of all great history, from the Greeks to the present.

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Lionel Trilling: The Contrariness of Culture

WILLIAM M. CHACE

When Lionel Trilling died in November 1975, his reputation as a literary essayist was, in some quarters, as strong as that attained by any critic in the postwar period. In the minds of some, he was due nothing less than reverence. The British poet and historian Robert Conquest summed up the feelings of some of Trilling's readers, on both sides of the Atlantic, in his four-line question: "What weaker disciplines shall bind, / What lesser doctors now protect, / The sweetness of the intellect, / The honey of the hive of mind?" Steven Marcus, writing from Columbia University, Trilling's academic home for virtually his entire life, declared that Trilling's writings "are now a permanent part of our culture's heritage." Douglas Bush, writing from Harvard, where Trilling had given the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures in 1970, said that Trilling's place would henceforth be "akin to that of the Victorian sages and prophets."

More interesting than this kind of reverence was that offered by intellectuals distinctly nonliterary in their sensibility. In the community of social scientists and historians, Trilling was not just awarded praise, but was seen as a writer unique in his understanding of society. He had absorbed society's truth: that it is a dense fabric of desire and limitation. Its existence, moreover, is genuine. It is not the product of ephemeral imagination, but of the history of conflict, error, and will. These social scientists would have agreed implicitly that "real" life is to be found in "real" books, in the great chronicles of the nineteenth century, in Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens, and later in James and Howells. Trilling argued, and they would have concurred, that the larger social enterprise, the great "hum and buzz" of social interaction, is the substance of things. It is even more important than mind, pure mind, itself.

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Even a critic of a much younger generation, Roger Sale, who was left dissatisfied and bored by Trilling himself, was fascinated by his importance and speculated that Trilling might have been the only literary essayist read by important nonliterary intellectuals. The late Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills, Daniel Bell, David Riesman, Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel P. Moynihan, and Richard Sennett have, in their writings, employed Trilling's ideas or expanded upon them. Irving Kristol has said that "the two contemporary thinkers who have most shaped my own thought . . . are Lionel Trilling and Leo Strauss." Philip Rieff has said that Trilling was "our superior teacher."

One reason for Trilling's sway over such minds is that he gave general consideration to history, politics, and morality and thereby extended himself beyond the traditional confines of an English department. Characteristically responsive to "context," "surroundings," and "conditions" (key words of his), he welcomed to his thinking disciplines other than his own. His repudiation of the New Criticism, of what he saw as its ahistorical and apolitical thrust, was a way of asserting, early in his career, the relevance of matters beyond the textual. So also was his repudiation, late in his career, of structuralism. Robert Langbaum recalls Trilling speaking at the University of Virginia shortly before his death: "He got on to the subject of structuralism; and concluded by saying that thirty years ago he had fought against Stalinism and that he would, if he were young, fight structuralism today as another system antithetical to will and individual freedom."

Another reason for Trilling's importance to those social scientists cited above is that he, like a remarkably large number of them, was a "survivor" of the 1930s' depression, of American-style Stalinism, "proletarian literature," the Stalinist-Trotskyist feuds, the reverberations passed down in the United States by the Moscow purges, the civil war in Spain, and the Nazi-Soviet pact. He, like them, was conditioned to believe in the "weight" of history and society. And he was permanently ill at ease with what he took as the fatuities and the heady aspirations of American liberalism; it had not been forced to "survive." It would not, or could not, accommodate itself to the givens of experience. Hence the censure of the liberal imagination, first in the book of essays so titled and published in 1950 and then, for the rest of his career, a censure culminating in his elegant but crushing attack in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972) on the liberalized versions of Freudian psychoanalysis conceived by D. F. Cooper and R. D. Laing.

But what was adulation of Trilling in some quarters of American intellectual life was condescension or disregard elsewhere. Many literary intellectuals believed that he was old-fashioned, weak because untheo-

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retical, tiresome in his suspicion of the new, and laborious as a prose stylist. When he died, many younger-generation critics saw him as the last representative of a form of criticism deserving of decline, tied as it was to personal style, moral anguish, and provincial memories. Roger Sale, gazing from afar at Trilling, said of him: "His is not a voice that one could expect to adapt itself easily to the sixties, and now that the sixties are almost as dead as the fifties, no one seems to be rediscovering him, finding out that he was right all along, or doing much more than vaguely wondering if he is still alive." Heavily formal psychoanalytic criticism, phenomenology, structuralism, and the new erotics of French-influenced discourse were now in vogue. In the latest literary conversation, Trilling's name was not likely to be mentioned.

Between young and old, then, and between those with a vested interest in the actual workings of everyday society and those who saw such interest as tedious, Trilling's reputation existed uneasily. Hence the recent republication of four of his books—*Matthew Arnold* (1939), *The Opposing Self* (1955), *A Gathering of Fugitives* (1956), and *Beyond Culture* (1965)—is an oddly remarkable event. Will the audience for these books be made up largely of the generation of "survivors" who wish to recall the intellectual tensions of the postwar years? Or (a most unlikely event) will Trilling's circumspect investigation of how literature and society meet be appealing enough to attract a younger generation of readers to his ideas for the first time?

The fate of his reputation might well be defined by terms he brought into play. During his career he provided the kind of sustenance needed by those who would, in later times, find him wanting. Indeed his unusual relationship to fellow intellectuals of whatever generation rests on the fact that his greatest doubts were always about intellectual life. As an influential critic in the heyday of *Partisan Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and the other smaller literary-cultural journals, he acted to restrain the freewheeling impulses of his fellow critics and, in turn, of his readers. He urged caution, noted ironic complications, and gravely remarked on the "variousness" of human fate. Admiring E. M. Forster, he noted that Forster saw the human intellect as a "treacherous" force existing in opposition to "the life of acceptant calm." Forster recognized the appeal of what Trilling called "the strange virtue of weariness."

Trilling never really wished the purely intellectual life to gain authority over the social life of which it was just one part. Intellect itself, he believed, was rootless and maverick, just as Edmund Burke had long ago said. Hence it should be limited and defined, colored and modulated, by other forces. The "little platoons" of particular experience and mundane reality *should* impede the monolithic workings of mind. Even genius

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should never run unimpeded, but should be made to encounter the interference of social reality. Literature opened Trilling's mind to experience, and he in turn wanted to open his readers' minds to literature. At the same time, however, literature (Howells, Austen, Keats, Wordsworth, Orwell) made him see that pure mental life is a phantasm. Thinking exists in life, but should never find absolute sway over it. Denis Donoghue is correct in his recent comment that "Trilling's mind distrusted the temptation to aspire beyond the finite condition to a state of being that is absolute, unconditioned, peremptory, detached from public consequence. . . ." Donoghue sees this as an inadequacy, particularly when he compares Trilling's critical mind to that of R. P. Blackmur. Donoghue, like Blackmur and like many latter-day critics in comparison with whom Trilling might appear as drably old-fashioned, grants to consciousness an imperiousness not to be denied save at the cost of subtracting from art and intellectual life their finest energies. But the fact is that Trilling also acknowledged those costs. The difference is that he was willing, even though he recognized the energies, to pay them.

Trilling's belief in the world of social reality as the only place from which the richest literary achievement of our time—the novel—could come, and his Burkean conservatism on the matter of unobstructed cerebration, also had their costs. The world of society, in being a world of prose, is substantial, complicated, and dense. But it is not a world that is comfortable with poetry, and Trilling, in his essays, was never at home with poetry. He wrote about the moral dimensions of poets like Keats, Wordsworth, and Arnold, but not about the inner life of their poetry. Helen Vendler, writing in a recent issue of the magazine *Salmagundi*, one partly devoted to Trilling, points out that Trilling "assumed that a poem is a discourse rather than an action." He had a way of detaching the sentiments of poetry from the medium of language in which they live. In the late 1970s, when linguistic environment and textuality are on the way to regaining the critical eminence they last possessed when the New Criticism was enjoying its triumphs, Trilling's prosaic moralism could not be any less fashionable.

Trilling's discomfort with art liberated from its social constraints, with art unfreighted by the novelist's sense of particularity, was not, however, the whole of his discomfort. By the 1960s and 1970s, that discomfort had intensified to such a degree that he was saying in *Commentary*: "What is the basis of our society's belief that art is so important? What do we expect of it? Only good, it seems. I am quite open to the idea that art can produce bad effects as well as good ones, even that what might be called good art can produce bad effects. . . . I would like to hear why, apart from its usefulness as entertainment, art should be

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supported." Nor was he unhappy, in the last decade or so of his life, with Rousseau's notion, cited in *Sincerity and Authenticity,* that "literature . . . is the pre-eminent agent of man's corruption, the essence or paradigm of the inherent falsehood of civilized society." Trilling in those years had come to unravel some of the more devastating implications of his own early arguments about the "adversary culture." He had become wary in the presence of "literary modernism" and of the evasions, dark fantasies, and nihilistic impulses that he believed it was ingeniously cultivating. Art, he had always thought, was not at its best when it nourished the destructive and insurrectionary impulses, or when it intruded into our personal lives, asking us directly if our sexual lives are good, our marriages secure, our sense of self sound, if "we are saved or damned." Modern literature—or rather its social agent, the adversary culture—was in the business of asking those questions and gaining public acclaim and profit by so doing. Trilling agreed with Irving Howe, another critic shaped by past memories of the 1930s and 1940s and by the tribulations of leftist political involvement. Writing in 1968, Howe said that the new sensibility of modernism, or commercial modernism

> is impatient with ideas. It is impatient with literary structures of complexity and coherence, only yesterday the catchwords of our criticism. It wants instead works of literature—though literature may be the wrong word—that will be as absolute as the sun, as unarguable as orgasm, and as delicious as a lollipop. . . . It is weary of the habit of reflection, the making of distinctions, the squareness of dialectic, the tarnished gold of inherited wisdom. It cares nothing for the memories of old Jews. . . . Floodlights glaring and tills overflowing, the new sensibility is a success from the very start.

Both Trilling and Howe want the same thing: that literature have "weight," that it evoke the human, that it describe human desire limited by human failure. If literature is to have any value for Americans, that value will be its opposition to the characteristic "weightlessness" of American sensibility as it moves without direction in an environment devoid of roots.

In Trilling's lifetime this Arnoldian faith in literature as a social stabilizer was submitted to some very harsh lessons. The high truculence of modern literature had demonstrated that the literary culture might provide only flimsy support to moral awareness. Modern literature had become divisive and sullen, or so Trilling came to believe. Art, he thought, was not at its best when it was mere symbolic action, such as that nourished by, say, Samuel Beckett, whom he never learned to like. For what good reason, then, should it be encouraged? He had believed, from the 1939 book on Matthew Arnold onward, that literature at its best

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was a form of moral action, action leading to other action. A consequence itself, it was admirable when it entailed morally "deepening" consequences.

But Trilling, whose dialectical motion of mind always kept him from being the easy captive of his own ideas, knew that he simply couldn't ignore modern literature. Intrusive and dangerous it might be, but it was the literature that the past, and modern circumstance, had given us. It too was a consequence; dislike it though he might, he could not deny it. There was something formidable and "exigent" (another of his key terms) about Beckett, Kafka, Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Yeats, Céline, and Isaac Babel. To ignore such genius, to pretend that the literature of benignity alone existed, was impossible. The domestic truths of William Dean Howells, although carefully explored in *The Opposing Self*, were not enough. Nor was Edith Wharton's "morality of inertia," lovingly described though it might have been in *A Gathering of Fugitives*. The homely little wisdom of bourgeois existence had its limits.

Trilling knew, in fact, that the peculiar fate of any literary critic was to be uneasy with the culture that surrounded him. The lesson was Freudian: we recognize that we are implicated, as individuals, in our culture. We recognize, moreover, that our involvement yields mixed pain and enhancement. We are made stronger by our involvement, but for that strength we must forfeit part of our inner being. Freud, as Trilling says in *Beyond Culture*, sees "the self as formed by its culture. But he also sees the self as set against the culture, struggling against it, having been from the first reluctant to enter it. Freud would have understood what Hegel meant by speaking of the '*terrible* principle of culture.' " If Freud, exasperated by culture, indignantly resisted it, then so did Trilling. And if Freud nonetheless knew he had to surrender himself to the culture, proclaiming that "where id was ego should be," so also did Trilling.

Hence Trilling, made uncomfortable by the great public noise of the adversary culture, nonetheless knew that intellectual and critical endeavor must consist of adversarial relationships. The drama of attaining selfhood, of gaining individual autonomy, is at the center of intellectual life. That drama takes place against the grain of experience provided by culture. Each of the forces in play—external culture and internal awareness—aspires to mastery: culture will have its way, but so indeed will individual singularity. The outcome of the struggle can be perception, a moment of understanding. But better even than understanding is rapprochement—a stillness, a moment of art, in which the tumult and anxiety of the struggle are held in abeyance.

The Trilling who had studied Freud and Hegel was impelled, I

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would argue, to enter into equilibrium with the ravages of modernity. The extraordinary book that ended his career, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, is his most complete (and most elegant) description of how he was to negotiate that entry, to come to terms with the force that he saw growing more imperious than he himself was. I would also argue that he could never wholly bring himself to believe that the activity of literary criticism could arrive at that equilibrium. Why? Because criticism, no matter how elegantly composed, is by definition an adversarial undertaking. It is the pawn of will and intellect, energy and desire. It, too, lacks serenity.

Art alone, and only the very best art, possesses serenity. In one of his last essays (never completed and posthumously published in the London *Times Literary Supplement*) Trilling wrote on the quality of stillness and equilibrium possessed by Jane Austen, saying:

> However committed to expressive action and significant utterance the Western paradigm of personhood may be, the Western person, as I have suggested, is not wholly without the capability of finding value in what is fixed, moveless and silent.

Encouraged perhaps by the value of the "moveless and silent" as it inheres in Jane Austen's novels, Trilling as a critic might, in his last years, have been working toward a new equanimity. Irving Howe, close to Trilling in those years, reports that the author of *Sincerity and Authenticity* was seeking "an art of sensual candor and carefree transparency which would not repudiate the entanglements of modernism but would now rest at ease with, or against, them."

Be this desire for equanimity and a carefree transparency as it may, Trilling's later style, even in so well-wrought and complete an intellectual and pedagogical statement as *Sincerity and Authenticity*, is densely involuted. It is at once urbane, dark, and torpid. It reflects authorial hesitancies and anxieties. It issues from a mind that desires to pay homage to art and imagination but has grown to distrust the nature of imagination. It desires to praise intellect, but now sees intellect everywhere put to bad uses. Trilling remembers his old arguments against the untrammeled authority of mind. Perhaps they were not bad arguments at all; perhaps they can now be reinforced. Perhaps criticism is too divisive, competitive; perhaps intellectual society in modern life is more problem than solution. Hence he could say in 1974, "In a certain sense I am arguing against education." For was not education—allied with literature and criticism, intellect and will—implicated in the same general ruination that he saw all around him?

Yet even in the 1970s Trilling was not ready to conclude, to take a unilateral position on matters so difficult. He recalled all his old argu-

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ments against intellect, but also recalled the solace he could find in literary art. Jane Austen's works, for instance, even now occupy a station in our culture that will remain permanently distant from the power of modernism to vulgarize or exploit everything in its path. "Moveless" and "silent," they remind us, as does much of great literature, of art's permanence and transcendence. For Trilling, who wished to move beyond contingency in all its injurious aspects, art of such stature had a curious relationship with death. Art and death are allied in the real world just as they are allied in our minds. He says that the human spirit contains

> the perception that art, even when it is at pains to create the appearance of intense and vigorous action, has the effect of transmuting that which is alive into that which has the movelessness and permanence of things past, assimilating it in some part to death.

Trilling knew that the transmuting process was not confined to the novels of Jane Austen, but was prevalent in great literature. With Hamlet, Macbeth, or Lear, ". . . the process of destiny must come to a stop: a point is reached at which each hero ceases to be a manifestation of will and comes to exist for us as idea or representation, as an object completed and, as it were, perfected." In that perfection, the object of artistic representation is somehow carried by death "beyond the reach of contingency."

Once again, then, Trilling returns to the problem that *Beyond Culture* illuminates: how does one move past contingency, past the erosiveness of culture? No matter how many times he posed the question (and his career was a series of increasingly more complex and rich ways of posing it), he came to the same answer. Art, in its powerful yet nonmorbid relationship to death, could relieve some of the encroaching pressure of culture.

The paradox is alive in his works. Of intellect and mind, he was suspicious. Yet intellect and mind were inextricably linked with art, to which he was always faithful. Between these two attitudes, the suspicious and the faithful, Trilling kept his place as his career came to an end. Read in its entirety, the criticism produced during his long years at Columbia University reveals that intense drama of cultural suspicion at odds with cultural faith. The drama of this conflict was not, of course, his alone. Lionel Trilling was not the only one who saw that the middle class, which had given to the adversary culture its writers and then its audience, had become in time the object of its hostility. Nor was he alone in remarking on the ugly internecine warfare being pursued within the largest and most important social class in recent Western history. Howe

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had seen it, as had Edward Shils, Jacques Barzun, Saul Bellow, and many others who have set about recently to contrive a resistance to such cultural self-annihilation. As Trilling looked on, just as Matthew Arnold looked on, at the spectacle of ruination, he was struck by how long it had been in the making. It had begun, he thought, with the Marxist tradition of secular rationality, class confrontation, and "massification" developing in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The turmoil of the 1960s was just the latest chapter. That is why, even with evidence so ephemeral as the temporary radicalizing of the Modern Language Association in the late sixties and the affirmative action edicts of HEW, he was ready to announce, in *Mind in the Modern World* (1972), that mind had come to "the end of its tether." His evidence here is not important, but his conviction is.

Unlike so many of those who agree with him about this decline, however, Trilling was not satisfied by merely describing his anxiety and exhaustion. That would have been a reaction empty of the contradictoriness of which his sensibility was made. He resisted making conclusions about culture, for their finality would have been at odds with the Hegelian process of antithesis and reformation at culture's center. So, as early as 1963, in his "Fate of Pleasure" essay, he declared that the culture of modernity about which he was anxious *is* a moral literature, with whose strenuousness and honesty we may proudly associate ourselves. In being at war with "the specious good," it possesses "the energy, the consciousness, and the wit" we can admire. Unlike other conservative critics, then, Trilling did not hope for a neutralization or withering away of modernist culture. Although it might provoke a general irresponsibility and malaise within the larger social enterprise, it might also be the only reality left to us as thinkers about which we can feel admiration. Upon it, he said, "we base whatever esteem we can lay claim to—it gives us . . . our 'last distinction.' . . . Can an adversary scrutiny of it point away from it to anything else than an idiot literature . . .?" Trilling correctly saw that we do not now respect any such idiot literature, with its "positive" heroes and shallow affirmations. We have learned to travel with Dostoevsky's Underground Man and, even at the cost of appearing only fashionable, to ally ourselves with "that extruded, 'high' segment of our general culture." It has a "violently subversive spirituality" which protects us from the surrounding culture that we also loathe and fear. This is what he meant by arguing that the very cultural process itself permits us to stand "beyond culture." He knew we would not enter, with all of our bizarre and suspicious-looking intellectual baggage, into the valley of idiot literature lying below the "extruded 'high' segment" of culture. He knew that we would always be

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trying to secure a station responsive to, and yet beyond, the givens of our culture. Being cultured, he knew, was being contrary.

The poise that Trilling maintained amid the contradictions he studied made him the critic he was. He has been judged a moralist, or a historian of moral consciousness, or a philosopher of culture. None of these does him perfect justice, but they are just in one particular respect: it is not the specific findings of his literary writings, the isolated aperçus, that give him his unmistakable value to the society in which he lived. His many thoughts and reflections must not be considered *thought* in any pure sense. He was not a theorist and he left to the future no literary philosophy. Nor was his writing left undamaged by his vague critical terms, by their portentousness and blurred immensity. Nor, it may selfishly be said, did he write enough. In the recent *Salmagundi,* Joseph Frank asks why Trilling did not write a book on Jane Austen, and says it is a pity that "so much of his later writing was occasional and (usually) obliquely polemical." Other readers will have wanted other things, but the books that might have been are the essays that are.

Rather than a historian, philosopher, or theorist, Trilling was a sensibility who cultivated thinking so that he might subsume it to the rhythms of his search for wisdom. His worth and his rare distinction will outlive his individual essays. And his identity as a critic will in time be disentangled from the provinciality of his milieu. He is far more than the narrow term "New York critic" can suggest. Alfred Kazin, in his recent memoir, *New York Jew,* seems to imagine a more honest and authentic Trilling, one more stubbornly rooted in his native environment. "For Trilling I would always be 'too Jewish,' " says Kazin, "too full of my lower-class experience. He would always defend himself from the things he had left behind." Kazin forgets that true achievement of any kind, intellectual or otherwise, is defined by the way it moves beyond the given, by how it leaves things behind. Trilling, a New Yorker and a Jew, was nevertheless not wholly of his time or of his place. He was "beyond culture," culture in both its largest and its most local and ensnaring forms. There really isn't a "better" or more "genuine" Trilling than the one found in his books.

Like Edmund Wilson, then, he will be seen as a writer who, in refusing to let the art of criticism rest within the confines of academic specialization, sought always to move it above the conventions and shibboleths of immediate surroundings. Wilson, a decade Trilling's senior, represents a broader and more various achievement; his curiosity was greater, his learning more far-ranging. But Trilling went more deeply than did Wilson into the problems he took as his own. And Trilling—as a deracinated, aloof, and inquiring university teacher—

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pursued more energetically than did the cantankerous and curious Wilson the ways in which he could employ the terms of literary criticism to understand the struggle for self-knowledge that his reading evoked in him. He will be seen as a writer who, by examining certain aspects of literature, helped to enlarge his readers' sense of moral complexity. That is not a small achievement, but it is probably old-fashioned. Trilling, like Wilson, *was* old-fashioned, but they are the two most important literary critics of the American mid-century and will, I think, outlive other critics now deemed more fashionable.

Literature, in Trilling's apprehension of it, was the criticism of life in being the criticism of *a* life, his own. In judging himself, Trilling worked always to define the warring and mutable contradictions by which he was constituted. By his example he helped to make more clear the same struggle of definition and recognition in his readers. In his prose, his self demonstrated affinities with other selves. Literary criticism is a quiet, imperfect, collective enterprise. It unites critic and reader. It was sustained, for years, by the drama of Trilling's self-critical examinations.

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Untuned String

PETER DAVISON

Yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it.
—Psalm 90

My childhood Steinway spoke in tongues.
Liebesleid for Schumann.
Lacrimae Rerum? Chopin.
Hesitant *ostinato* for Purcell,
hypotaxis between the voices of Bach.

It matters who mans the keyboard.
Sometimes a visitor—Lhevinne, Sykes, Raieff—
could make the family instrument talk turkey,
but when I perched up tight between its legs
my stubby fingers whacked out sounds
that broke the charge of music.

Ah god in the machine! You have cast
a penumbra of sound across all memory,
the purple garment of Europe I wear,
my American secret. And you strike
an even darker note: something's amiss with my hands.
I can carry a tune only with voices.
Never fit to manage
the nineteenth century's noblest invention
(the one that enabled mere men
to "establish the work of their hands")
I am shut out from taking a hand in sonatas,
dismissed from polonaise, mazurka, prelude, fugue,
mordant, glissando, thoroughbass.
I may not harrow music with my hands.
I'm struck dumb by a pentecost of piano.

● PETER DAVISON's fifth collection of poems, *A Voice in the Mountain*, appeared in late 1977. He is director of the Atlantic Monthly Press and poetry editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

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The Grapes

ANTHONY HECHT

At five o'clock of a summer afternoon
We are already shadowed by the mountain
On whose lower slopes we perch, all of us here
At the *Hôtel de l'Univers et Déjeuner.*
The fruit trees and the stone lions out front
In deepening purple silhouette themselves
Against the bright green fields across the valley
Where, at the *Beau Rivage,* patrons are laved
In generous tides of gold. At cocktail time
Their glasses glint like gems, while we're eclipsed.
Which may explain
Why the younger set, which likes to get up late,
Assess its members over aperitifs,
Prefers that western slope, while we attract
A somewhat older, quieter clientele,
Americans mostly, though they seem to come
From everywhere, and are usually good tippers.
Still, it is strange and sad, at cocktail time,
To look across the valley from our shade,
As if from premature death, at all that brilliance
Across which silently on certain days
Shadows of clouds slide past in smooth parade,
While even our daisies and white irises
Are filled with blues and darkened premonitions.
Yet for our patrons, who are on holiday,
Questions of time are largely set aside.
They are indulgently amused to find

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All the news magazines on the wicker table
In the lobby are outrageously outdated.
But *Madame* likes to keep them on display;
They add a touch of color, and a note
Of home and habit for many, and it's surprising
How thoroughly they are read on rainy days.
And I myself have smuggled one or two
Up to my bedroom, there to browse upon
Arrested time in *Time, Incorporated.*
There it is always 1954,
And Marlon Brando, perfectly preserved,
Sullen and brutal and desirable,
Avoids my eyes with a scowl, the record mile
Always belongs to Roger Bannister,
The rich and sleek of the international set
Are robbed of their furs and diamonds, get divorced
In a world so far removed from the rest of us
It almost seems arranged for our amusement
As they pose for pictures, perfectly made-up,
Coiffured by Mr. Charles, languid, serene.
They never show up here—our little resort
Is far too mean for them—except in my daydreams.
My dreams at night are reserved for Marc-Antoine,
One of the bellboys at the *Beau Rivage.*
In his striped vest with flat buttons of brass
He comes to me every night after my prayers,
In fantasy, of course; in actual fact
He's taken no notice of me whatsoever.
Quite understandable, for I must be
Easily ten years older than he, and only

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A chambermaid. As with all the very young,
To him the future's limitless and bright,
Anything's possible, one has but to wait.
No doubt it explains his native cheerfulness.
No doubt he dreams of a young millionairess,
Beautiful, spoiled and ardent, at his feet.
Perhaps it shall come to pass. Such things have happened.
Even barmaids and pantry girls have been seen
Translated into starlets tanning themselves
At the end of a diving board. But just this morning
Something came over me like the discovery
Of a deep secret of the universe.
It was early. I was in the dining room
Long before breakfast was served. I was alone.
Mornings, of course, it's we who get the light,
An especially tender light, hopeful and soft.
I stood beside a table near a window,
Gazing down at a crystal bowl of grapes
In ice water. They were green grapes, or, rather,
They were a sort of pure, unblemished jade,
Like turbulent ocean water, with misted skins,
Their own pale, smoky sweat, or tiny frost.
I leaned over the table, letting the sun
Fall on my forearm, contemplating them.
Reflections of the water dodged and swam
In nervous incandescent filaments
Over my blouse and up along the ceiling.
And all those little bags of glassiness,
Those clustered planets, leaned their eastern cheeks
Into the sunlight, each one showing a soft

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Meridian swelling where the thinning light
Mysteriously tapered into shadow,
To cool recesses, to the tranquil blues
That then were pillowing the *Beau Rivage*.
And watching I could almost see the light
Edge slowly over their simple surfaces,
And feel the sunlight moving on my skin
Like a warm glacier. And I seemed to know
In my blood the meaning of sidereal time
And know my little life had somehow crested.
There was nothing left for me now, nothing but years.
My destiny was cast and Marc-Antoine
Would not be called to play a part in it.
His passion, his Dark Queen, he'd meet elsewhere.
And I knew at last, with a faint, visceral twitch,
A flood of weakness that comes to the resigned,
What it must have felt like in that rubber boat
In mid-Pacific, to be the sole survivor
Of a crash, idly dandled on that blank
Untroubled waste, and see the light decline,
Taper and fade in graduated shades
Behind the International Date Line—
An accident I read about in *Time*.

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Prose Style and the Fall of Empire

J. MITCHELL MORSE

IT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT HENRY JAMES ever saw a dog watering a tree. With his involuted way of perceiving the world, he could not have perceived anything so simple. His eyes might have focused on it clearly enough, but his fine mind could not have received such a commonplace image. Indeed, if the dog had been one of those thoroughly domesticated dogs that are finely sensitive to human moods, he would have been nonplussed; for he *could not* have watered the tree in a way that could be represented through the prose of Henry James.

Jack London, on the other hand, would have seen the dog very well, and could have written a vivid description of the watering of the tree if only his editors had permitted. He was very good at writing about dogs within the limits of editorial decorum; it was his human characters who lacked life. His prose didn't permit him to see anything so complex as an individual human being. Within the limits of his language, he could see only abstractions: adventurers, workers, exploiters, the unemployed, the idle rich, and lovers whose transports did not transport them beyond the conventions of the *Saturday Evening Post*. If Henry James and Jay Gould had stood before Jack London at the same time, both the fineness of James and the coarseness of Gould would have escaped him: he could not have distinguished between those two specimens of the upper class. Gould likewise would have been unable to distinguish between James and London: he would have seen them both merely as impecunious nobodies whom it would not be profitable to speak to. Of those three, only James would have sensed the comedy of the situation, for only he had a style that could re-create it.

We perceive situations by re-creating them in our minds. Our senses give us only the raw materials; the process of re-creation, and hence of perception, is one of composition. Our language determines not only how we see but also, to a large extent, what we see.

What we want to see is another matter, determined by emotion; we can write well only if we develop a style that enables us to see what we

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want to see—because we can't even know with any clarity what we want to see until we have seen it; and the quality of our writing is directly proportional to the appropriateness of our style to our subject. Gibbon's neoclassic antitheses and abstractions, sometimes swelling beyond decorum into pomposity, were entirely appropriate for writing about the decline of the classic culture; they also expressed the decline of the neoclassic culture; they were in fact roughly contemporaneous with its fall in the revolutions of 1776 and 1789—a fall which had already begun in the revolution of 1688, and from which the neoclassic culture did not rise in the counterrevolution of 1815. The Congress of Vienna could restore nothing, because it could not raise the dead. By 1815 Latin, ancient Greek, and antithetical prose in modern languages—notwithstanding a few brilliant stylists in the classic mode, such as De Quincey and Macaulay—were effectually dead except in the schools and universities, and the neoclassic culture with them. No culture can survive its idiom, its verbal style: a mode in which most thinking people no longer think can no longer be a mode of life.

A good case can be made for the view that Latin, Greek, and the antithetical style were killed by those who most diligently nurtured them; Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), though he said that Latin was "absolutely necessary for a gentleman," was so appalled by the way it was taught to children, and by both the methods and the substance of more advanced instruction in classic versification, rhetoric, logic, and metaphysics, that he concluded, "A great part of the learning now in fashion in the schools of Europe and that goes ordinarily into the round of education, a gentleman may in a good measure be unfurnished with, without any great disparagement to himself or prejudice to his affairs." Thomas Gray, born in 1716, wrote Latin verse with great facility, but published only in English. My colleague Gabriele Jackson informs me that Gray, toward the end of his life, set out to translate Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* into Latin hexameters, with the intention of doing for Locke what Lucretius had done for Epicurus, but soon gave it up. Even the gentle Gray, unfamiliar as he was with worldly considerations, recognized the foolishness of such a project. It was almost on a par with the labors of H. Allen Smith's old retired judge, who made a hobby of translating the works of Faith Baldwin into ancient Greek.

As a matter of fact, the decline of classic culture had begun long before—even before the military decline of the Roman Empire; it had begun with the death of Cicero. Rome fell because no subsequent writer could live up to Cicero's prose. From his pure chaste elegance and dignity, all prose, and everything else with it, declined into imperial gorgeousness, medieval corruption, Renaissance rodomontade, neo-

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classic epigonism, and romantic hyperacidity and gassiness. All the turbulence and confusion of the romantic age—a turbulence and confusion from which we still suffer—were implicit in the death of Cicero.

The confusion of our time, its lack of direction, its explosive centrifugal flying in all directions, is due to many nonliterary causes, but chiefly to the literary individualism that has given us so many good styles instead of one. I say this not in dismay but in joy. The twentieth century is the great age of the free artist, whose vision is not determined or even influenced by any official point of view. How different from ancient Athens, ancient Rome, medieval and Renaissance Europe, and—as far as my scanty knowledge goes—the corresponding or analogous ages in the East, when official patronage supported the greatest artists, who with rare exceptions shared the official religion, accepted with few or no reservations the official view of the world, and celebrated with more or less honesty official celebrative occasions. There were few opportunities for dissident artists. But in the Western world now there are so many, and official views have so little credit among artists, that there is no good official art now. Nobody expects official art to be any good. Vergil no longer reads to Augustus. We have no *Aeneid*. In the United States, where the oldest buildings (with few exceptions) are those of the eighteenth century, the lobby walls of courthouses, post offices, and state capitols are gaudy with murals worthy of the graduating class of any pretty good art school; Grant's tomb stands overlooking the Hudson like a giant wedding cake ornament designed by the chairman of the architecture department at any state college of engineering and agriculture; Mount Rushmore and Stone Mountain, two beautiful products of nature, have been denatured by official portraits in stone; the grounds of every southern state capitol are adorned with equestrian statues of the local Confederate generals and other monuments of unaging intellect; and the statues of Union generals in the North, and of Indian fighters in the West, are equally beautiful. The uniforms are rendered with absolute fidelity to every medal and button. In Russia, I gather, every city of any size has a statue of Lenin just as good; and within the limits of my observation the modern official art of Western Europe is of like quality.

Such official art is not to be compared with that of Phidias or Praxiteles or Michelangelo or Leonardo or Bernini or any of the great official artists of the past. In our time the most beautiful, the most aesthetically pleasing products of our widely shared public vision—achieved with official support and expressing our best communal values—are not called art. They are suspension bridges, high mountain bridges, highway interchanges, and airplanes. We are in motion; the best official expressions of our public sense of beauty are works of engineering that facilitate motion.

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Meanwhile our private sensibilities go their individual ways. In literature now, private sensibility is the only sensibility. There is no good official literature now, and—with the single exception of Thomas Mann, who lived to repent it—there has been none since the doubtful case of Goethe. Zola, in a letter to Huysmans, said, "Il y a trois choses qui déshonorent un écrivain: *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, la Légion d'Honneur, et l'Académie Française." As long as Swinburne was a good poet there was no danger of his being named poet laureate, but when he became a good boy and started writing thumping patriotic verse worthy of Lord Curzon, the only thing that saved him from being nominated to the laureateship—a nomination that in his stupefied state he would have accepted—was the discovery by a member of the committee that he had once dispraised the Czar of Russia.

Mussolini had his Marinetti—who, as Eugen Weber said, died "bespattered with honors"; Franco had his José María Gironella, whose novel *Peace After War* is full of political discussions in which people exchange long speeches giving various reasons for accepting fascism; Stalin had his Mikhail Sholokhov, who combines the talents of Zane Grey, Edna Ferber, Frank Yerby, James Oliver Curwood, and Harold Bell Wright, and whose novels lend themselves to epic treatment on the screen because they have casts of thousands, many of whom are horses. But none of these writers amounts to anything as a writer; and on the rare occasions when a good writer writes officially he writes badly. Eliot was a good poet, but the choruses he contributed in 1934 to the Church of England's pageant *The Rock* are so bad it embarrasses even me to read them. They have the tone of what his friend Pound called "preaching to the mob." Eliot was much more successful in presenting his point of view through poetry that was not explicitly political or religious—that is to say, when he heeded his own insight about the necessity of finding objective correlatives.

There is no need to be unduly materialistic about all this. Of course it goes without saying that style is a product of history, but it is equally true that history is a product of style. Italian history produced the gloriously comic Victor Emmanuel monument, but that monument produced Mussolini and fascism; the German military-industrial complex would not have produced Hitler if its taste had not been formed by the scoutmasterish style of Clausewitz; we Americans would not have produced Nixon (whose pious authoritarianism was that of a Blifil or Chichikov) if our taste had not been formed by the styles of Norman Rockwell, James Whitcomb Riley, and Edgar A. Guest; and the Russians would not have produced Stalin or Gromyko or anyone in between if they had not been besotted with the style of Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*

What, indeed, is art? Having learned that the way to get the true

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answer to any question, stated forthrightly, is to ask a person who has read at most one article on the subject, I shall not undertake to answer this one. I merely observe, tentatively, that an inferior style seems to produce an inferior vision—a cheaper or at least a less valuable perception of reality; and that conversely a superior style seems to produce a superior or at least a more interesting perception of reality.

Nobody will deny, I believe, that as a literary artist Shakespeare is superior to his sources; his depictions of history are therefore superior to those of Plutarch and Holinshed not only as works of art but also as means of insight into history. Nobody will deny, I believe, that Rabelais was superior both to the anonymous *Grandes et Inestimables Cronicques du grant et énorme géant Gargantua,* which was one of his sources, and to the third book of *Gulliver's Travels,* one of whose sources he was. In these cases, superiority of style carries within it all other superiorities.

Likewise with inferiorities. James Carker's flight from Mr. Dombey, in *Dombey and Son,* is obviously an inferior imitation of Tristram Shandy's flight from death; the headmaster's suggestion that Philip Carey consider studying for the priesthood, in *Of Human Bondage,* is obviously an inferior imitation of the director's similar suggestion to Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man;* and Roquentin's tour of the Bouville museum in *La Nausée* is obviously an inferior imitation of Malte Laurids Brigge's tour of the family portrait gallery. Inferiority of style carries within it all other inferiorities.

Finally, consider the intertwined themes of the dandy and the voluptuary; ironic Plato, ironically arguing that a wise man is superior to fortune, since he maintains his own moral virtues and physical health and strength, nevertheless ironically admitted that such external blessings as wealth, friends, good repute, and good looks, though not necessary for happiness, were of course helpful. He ironically advises us to look into a mirror from time to time, as an aid in maintaining our courage, prudence, temperance, justice, health, strength, and seemliness of behavior.

Baudelaire's ideal man likewise, "le Dandy," should live before a mirror in order to maintain his elegance, inner as well as outer; but where Plato was calmly ironic, Baudelaire was irascible and splenetic—and that difference of style is an unmistakable manifestation of his smaller stature and narrower vision. I refer only to his journals, not to his incomparable poetry, whose style lifted him above all ordinariness.

The earnest William Beckford's Vathek, a mere voluptuary, is as far below the scornful Baudelaire's Dandy as le Dandy is below the ironic Plato's wise man—chiefly because of Beckford's ridiculous prose style, which made it impossible for him to think with any taste or dignity.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of

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the twentieth, Robert de Montesquiou undertook to form his own life on the model of le Dandy, with perhaps just a touch of Vathek, and in turn inspired at least four literary imitations: Huysmans's Des Esseintes, Wilde's Lord Harry and his disciple Dorian Gray, and Proust's Baron Charlus. If we were to rank these characters in order of quality as literary creations, I believe there would be general agreement that the Baron Charlus should come first, Des Esseintes at some distance below him, and Dorian Gray and Lord Harry far below Des Esseintes—way down there with Adolphe Menjou, Somerset Maugham, and Edgar Saltus. I believe also that we would agree that the superior complexity of the superior characters is in large part a result of the superior prose of which they are constituted, and the relative shallowness of the inferior characters a result of the inferior prose of which they are constituted.

The decline of civilization also, as I have just irrefutably demonstrated, is largely due to the prevalence of inferior prose. That is why those of us who struggle in the schools to persuade our students that articulacy is better than inarticulacy must never yield to our colleagues who assure them that they have a right to be inarticulate.

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Teggart of Berkeley

ROBERT NISBET

At Berkeley in the early 1930s, when I was an undergraduate, almost all student ratings, sober or beery, ranked Frederick J. Teggart among the outstanding teachers on the campus. That was a substantial honor then, for undergraduate teaching was taken seriously. No matter how illustrious one might be as scholar or scientist, the reputation for giving a good course, above all for being a stimulating lecturer, meant a good deal to the faculty and therefore to the students. The time hadn't yet come at Berkeley—or any other university in this country, so far as I know—when teaching below the graduate level would be regarded as demeaning, would be stigmatized by faculty efforts to escape it, and when freshmen and sophomores would be consigned to the ministrations of the immature or incompetent. (What with the recently discovered economic importance of undergraduates to universities, the time I speak of may have come and be now on its way. I hope so.)

Even, and especially, the introductory courses were taught by mature, often distinguished, scholars and scientists. Teggart's greatest fame as a teacher rested upon his introductory course, which he taught continuously from 1919 until his retirement from teaching in 1940. Freshmen in chemistry and physics knew the experience of being lectured to year after year by National Academy scientists. Scholars of equal distinction taught the beginning courses in history, geography, literature, zoology, and so on. The rationale was then obvious: it was important that beginning students be put in direct contact with an active, learned mind, one whose luster could be expected to provide direct stimulus to the best students and leave some reflection in the work of all.

Such courses could be large—occasionally a thousand in Wheeler Auditorium; very often several hundred in just about every field, from art history to zoology. No doubt there were students in those courses who would have benefited from small classes, but I don't recall many complaints. Somehow, after high school, the air seemed freer and more invigorating in the large lecture courses. And there was the special kind of excitement that came from the knowledge that the individual you were listening to, and taking notes from, was an internationally renowned scholar or scientist. Better, it used to be said, to sit fifty feet from a first-rate mind than ten feet from a mediocrity. I well recall one poll of student opinion conducted by the faculty's Committee on Courses that yielded many more complaints about small classes than about the large lecture courses. Too often in the small classes, it was said, there was an obvious lack of real preparation by the instructor and undue reliance upon unstructured and uninstructive student discussion. Not many faculty members facing several hundred students would court the risk of being thought unprepared, inept, or dull.

The custom of student applause existed (it may still exist) at Berkeley. Such applause was standard at the end of a course, but you could tell from its volume and duration how much the course had been appreciated. More important in some ways, the same custom dictated that even during the term students should applaud an unusually good lecture. Any faculty member would have had to be

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singularly insensitive to be unaffected by such a reaction to a given lecture. For him, as for the actor, applause was at once reward and stimulus.

Lecturing at Berkeley in those years was definitely an art form, something one worked hard to perfect to the best of his abilities. Substance was of course crucial. No amount of platform presence could disguise emptiness of content. But given content and seriousness of purpose it was almost as important in the large lecture hall as in the theater or the pulpit to develop powers of expression that would be distinctive and effective. Students not infrequently sensed a dramatic finesse, or preacher's fire, in the lectures they heard. It was style as well as content that made Teggart's course popular and also respected.

I would not for a moment suggest that there weren't some poor lecturers at Berkeley. But I am convinced that had there not been the tradition of first-rate lecturing, and also the tradition of applause from the students, such lecturers would have been much worse than they actually were. Sometimes, no matter how assiduously an individual might strive for effectiveness before the large class, the results made it all futile. I was told in later years that the anthropologist A. L. Kroeber, the psychologist Edward Tolman, and the physicist Ernest Lawrence—all obviously titans—had at different times, before I reached Berkeley as a student, attempted to teach the introductory course in their respective fields, but with conspicuous lack of success. All three were, as the scientific world knows, notable teachers, but in other contexts. One can only marvel today, given the university setting we have come to know in America since World War II, that there was ever a time when scientists of the stature of Kroeber, Tolman, and Lawrence would have wanted, and would have been permitted by their departments, to teach beginning courses. But in the Berkeley of the 1930s, and other universities also, such courses were not held to be demeaning, and the status of a scholar or scientist was not measured by the degree of his liberation from contact with undergraduates.

Large lecture courses are in rather poor odor today. They have been ever since the vogue of the "experimental" college or curriculum began in the 1950s, when smallness and intimacy in a classroom became ends in themselves quite apart from their actual contribution to a genuine education. For many people today the "rap session" is held to be the very essence of a university education. There is certainly a place for small classes, an indispensable place in a good many instances. But I should not like to see the large lecture course disappear—so long as it is in mature, scholarly hands. There are gifted faculty minds whose light is brighter before several hundred students than it is before a handful. In these minds there lies, no doubt, a repressed desire for the stage or the pulpit.

Frederick J. Teggart was one of these. He had, in fact, been very active in amateur theater circles in San Francisco when he was young, and obviously enjoyed giving a good performance in his large course, although the mark of the preacher was often evident. There were two settings in which I found Teggart superb as a teacher: the large class, where he could open up in almost spellbinding fashion, and his office, in conversations sparked either by my questions or my manifest gaps in knowledge. I did not find him effective in his seminars, undergraduate or graduate. I was told by older members of the faculty that in earlier years he had been noted for his seminars, but he wasn't in my time. There was a good deal more to be learned from him in the large class, even the third or fourth time around as a graduate assistant, than in one of his small seminars. But it was in his office—where I saw him often, inasmuch as I had volunteered to be his book runner simply to have extra opportunities for talking with him—that I learned the most from him.

Exactly two hundred students enrolled each fall in his introductory course—not, by Berkeley standards then, a large course, especially in the lower division. The number of students would surely have risen had Teggart been willing to give up 312 Wheeler, where for so many years he gave his Progress and Civilization course, supposedly to freshmen and sophomores but in actuality also to a large number of upperclassmen and even graduate students from all parts of the campus. But he wasn't willing. He liked the acoustics and the appearance of the room,

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and anyhow, as he once confessed, it was only a few steps from his office, where he spent nine or ten hours every day at work, often over weekends.

There was something about Teggart's appearance and his manner of entering the lecture room and striding to the rostrum that silenced student conversation instantly. Never once did he have to wait a moment or two, as most of us do, for the chatter to cease and newspapers be put down. Not that he was in any way overbearing. He was simply the essence of academic man in his bearing, with a natural dignity that no one was likely to wish to encroach upon; not least, there was the appeal of his getting under way as quickly as possible in a lecture that students could expect would be important and eloquently delivered. Teggart was adamant in his refusal to allow his teaching assistants to take attendance, as was done in a few introductory courses: "They are in a university now, not a school, and academic freedom includes the freedom to cut class at will—provided they pay the consequences." The result was that those students who were present wanted to be there and wanted the action to start. He lectured with force, even passion at times. Clearly he believed that what he had to say was important, and he made it seem important. Once a student's characterization of Teggart's lecturing in the campus newspaper referred to his "evangelical zeal." I had expected him to snort dismissively at this, for he had roughly the same opinion of evangelism that H. L. Mencken had. But Teggart seemed to like it and think it accurate. He admitted that in his childhood in Northern Ireland he had heard his share of preachers "with fire in their bellies."

Teggart was, according to solemn, established student opinion, "one of the two most learned minds on the faculty" (the other being the redoubtable Max Radin in the Law School). When and how this remarkable judgment was formed on the campus I have no idea. But no one, at least in my student experience, seemed to doubt it, and we heard the statement rather often. Whether Teggart was actually one of the two, ten, or fifty most learned minds is of no consequence here. I offer that bit of lore only as an indication of what in those years could impress students, even undergraduates. The time had not yet arrived when faculty members could derive their honor from presiding over some large and wealthy research institute on the campus, from the publicized amounts of research grants, from the number of industrial or governmental consultantships held, or the number of times one had been secretary or director of something in Washington. There were but two sources of honor then on the campus—teaching and reputed learning, and in that order.

In point of fact, Teggart was a very learned scholar. I have met no one since then who has approached him in range, diversity, and depth of knowledge. One need only scan his books to sense this, even his little, footnote-free *Processes of History*, which Toynbee paid tribute to many years after its publication as one of the primary sources of inspiration for his own *Study of History*.

Teggart could unite his teaching and research more effectively than anyone else I have known. His current reading or investigation of some point in scholarly literature often came out in his lectures. I don't mean that each term's lectures were likely to be direct reflections of whatever he happened to be working on at the time. The course had a definite structure; major themes or emphases continued, albeit in altered form, from one year to the next. But Teggart had the insight to realize that students of any degree of maturity were likely to be interested in whatever genuinely interested him.

He lectured from brief, penciled notes on a single sheet of paper. I learned later, when I was his graduate assistant in the course, that he prepared these during the hour or two before his lecture. In some teachers this can make for thinness, anecdotalism, a preponderance of rhetoric over substance. It didn't with Teggart. He had remarkable powers of recall while on his feet, and he seemed to have no difficulty whatever in building his spare, telegraphic notes into sentences and paragraphs which, from both style and content, might have been prepared word for word in advance. I once asked him why, in order to save energy, he hadn't spent some early year typing his lectures for reuse. All he said was, "Never type your lectures; you and the students will both be their slaves."

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His introductory course differed in one important respect from all others on the campus. They were introductions to a recognized discipline: history, economics, physics, et cetera. Teggart, however, because of his excommunication by the Department of History, had his own department, the Department of Social Institutions. It had been created by the regents in 1919 to contain his own teaching and research interests—interests that at least two other departments had found too heretical or irrational to make him welcome in their ranks. Teggart taught essentially Teggartism, a word he loathed but that had currency on the campus. Not that it was always used with indulgence or respect. Teggart had his full share of enemies and detractors, and the word could come out as a sneer.

He knew this very well, and although it didn't seem to bother him (I think it actually pleased him, given his reclusiveness and his scorn for so much that others did in history and the social sciences), he would nevertheless caution students who indicated a desire to do graduate work under him. When, in the spring of 1936, I went up to his office to ask his approval for my Ph.D. work beginning the following autumn, he began by turning me down flatly, on the ground that no department in the country recognized him or his work and that I would never get a job. I persisted, though, and got his reluctant consent, but then only on condition that I develop a strong minor in some other department.

Just as his writings fall into intellectual history on the one hand and comparative social history on the other, so did his introductory course. He began each year with an arresting history of the idea of progress, an idea I hadn't even heard of before enrolling in his introductory course in 1934. I do not know when he first introduced the idea into his teaching, but I would guess by 1910, when he was still a member of the History department; for in that year a seminal article of his appeared in the *American Historical Review*, "The Circumstance or the Substance of History," in which much of the theme hangs upon the idea of progress. Certainly it played a large role in his teaching from 1919 on, the year he created his own department and first offered the course I was taking as an undergraduate. As far as I know, Teggart was the first in this country to build a course, even a curriculum, in some degree around the history of the idea, and he was also among the very first to appreciate fully its real importance and its wide and subtle influence in Western thought from the time of the Greeks.

He made his students see, just as he did the readers of his articles and books, the several guises, so to speak, under which the perspective of progress had appeared in the humanities and the sciences—such guises as "social evolution," "developmentalism," and "historical growth," each utterly unrelated, as he used to emphasize strongly, to the kind of work that Darwin and Mendel had done in the nineteenth century; each in truth but a manifestation of the master idea in Western thought: progress. He gave us a detailed history of the idea, but more than that he provided a highly critical assessment. When the last lecture on the history of the idea was completed at midyear, Teggart turned to comparative cultures and social institutions. We had been given a prophylaxis, so to speak, against the common fallacies that attended the presentation of world history, all emanating from the perspective of progress which had led—from Saint Augustine's *City of God* to H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*—to a compressing of the diversity of mankind through time into a single unilinear series of epochs and stages, with Western civilization invariably made the triumphant outcome of the series. Repeatedly he had impressed upon us the enormity of such parochialism; in large part, he would argue, it was a consequence of historians' dedication, ever since Thucydides, to the narrative—the "first this, and then, and then, and then" approach. Such a form, he would tell us, is suitable to literature and religion ("everybody loves a good narrative; it relaxes"), but it is a totally inadequate means of presenting the true diversity, the plurality of mankind's history.

History, I can hear him now, almost thundering, is not unitary but plural. The world is made up of many histories, many time frames, and it is sheer distortion of these histories to seek to put them all in a West-oriented, basically imaginary progression. If you wish to entertain and divert, by all means, he would say, construct narratives. It doesn't matter whether you call them fiction or his-

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tory; the narrative approach is bound to reduce diverse material to fiction in some degree.

What the French historians of the *Annales* school today refer to, critically, as *l'histoire événementielle*—written history that is but a string of events, dates, actions, and their asserted causes—was anathema for Teggart. He had begun writing against this form of historiography as early as the 1910 article I referred to above. His *Prolegomena to History* (1916) carried his analysis and criticism further. It is his *Theory of History* (1925), though, that contains his most thorough and penetrating analysis of the frailties and inherent fallacies which attend all unilinear efforts to comprehend the diversity and plurality of historical data. The book is at one and the same time an attack upon the narrative in historical writing and upon the idea of social evolution in the social sciences. I respect what more recent writers, such as Karl Popper, have had to say about "historicism" (to borrow Popper's term), but quite apart from the fact that Teggart long preceded them, his *Theory of History* seems to me even now more profound and searching, more deeply aware of the issues involved, than any others I have read.

But even that remarkable work cannot convey the intensity with which he dealt in our class with the topics contained in the book. He was tireless in his criticisms of the narrative method and equally tireless in his insistence that the only worthwhile approach to historical data is, in the first place, rooted in selection of a bona fide problem and, second, oriented comparatively in space and in time. Only then can we do justice to the multitude of histories. We turn, when necessary, to the entire world, just so long as the question or problem we have begun with gives us guidance.

It was very probably Teggart's world orientation that the class enjoyed most in the course's content. He moved with such seeming ease and confidence from one civilization to another, past and present, in his highlighting of some problem. His comparative approach to world history was a heady experience for most of us, saturated as we were with conventional narratives, chiefly American and English, taught from the third grade onward. For the first time in our lives we were hearing—pertinently and excitingly—about China, India, Babylonia, Israel, Egypt, and many other civilizations of the past. Never, let me emphasize, did he speak in survey or travelogue fashion, which would have been deadly. He never brought up a civilization or culture, a seaport city, a trade route, a mountain pass, a river valley except as a means of casting light upon some problem. It was *histoire problème, histoire comparative*, that we were getting.

One of the more striking problems he would bring up year after year is that posed by the appearance within a single century of such widely separated founders of religions as Confucius and Lao-tze in China, Mahavira and Buddha in India, Zoroaster in Persia, Ezekiel and the Second Isaiah in Israel, Thales in Ionia, and Pythagoras in southern Italy. How, Teggart would ask, his voice rising in dramatic emphasis, are we to confront this astonishing phenomenon? As a true *problem*, warranting the most careful research? Or do we walk away from it as a—and his voice would ascend still higher, all stops pulled—*mere* COINCIDENCE?

For all I know, that extraordinary clustering *is* but coincidence. But after hearing Teggart on it, there couldn't have been many students in the class who were not ready to volunteer immediately for service in the assault upon *the problem*. Teggart never implied that he had any answers, but in the course of illuminating the problem we were treated to some enlightening lectures on the geographic and social mobility of Eurasia during the centuries preceding the Christian era: the migrations of peoples, invasions, wars, and other forces leading to the meeting of diverse cultures; the trade routes crossing Asia to Europe (which, Teggart would remind us, carried ideas and values as well as gems and fabrics); and the significance of what he called "idea systems" (a concept I find in Teggart's writing from 1918 at least; it is pretty much what the *Annales* historians today refer to as *mentalités*) and the consequences of their disintegration under geohistorical forces, and on the comparable military, political, economic, and social settings within which the prophets had lived. There was much historical geography in all this.

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Teggart had been deeply influenced by Sir Halford Mackinder's work, and the ideas of "Heartland" and "the geographical pivot of history" were conveyed to us.

Another of the problems Teggart liked to put before students was that of the sporadic, uneven appearances in world history of the great ages of intellectual and cultural achievement—such as the Athens of Pericles, the European twelfth century, the Age of Elizabeth, the Han dynasty in China, the Age of the Guptas in India, and so on. A few words from the preface to Teggart's *Rome and China* will suggest the nature of the problem he was interested in:

> The history of human achievement . . . displays extraordinary variations of advance and subsidence. How are the outstanding advances of men at different times and places to be accounted for? Think of ancient Egypt and Babylonia. How are the great periods of supreme attainment to be accounted for? Think of Sophocles and Shakespeare. How are the cessations of effort to be accounted for? Think of the old antagonists Greece and Persia. On these questions men have speculated and written many books. But no one has approached the questions with any semblance of the patient care exercised in the study of an atom of hydrogen, even though the systematic investigation of the problems hinted at lies well within the limits of possibility.

Those words were printed in 1939, but since 1919 students in Teggart's introductory course, and also in his upper division courses, had been hearing their message; even in senior and graduate seminars students had worked at the problem constituted by recurring ages of sterility as well as of efflorescence in human achievement. A. L. Kroeber, in his *Configurations of Culture Growth* (1944), dealt with the problem in some measure, but that book is more a set of tabular listings of fertility and drought than it is a work of explanation. Teggart, to me at least, affected to be unimpressed by the book, declaring rather extravagantly that, a quarter of a century earlier, students—*undergraduate* students, he trumpeted, carried away with the thought—had done better work in his seminars. To which I could only respond, mutely: a pity they never saw more light of day than they did. Teggart himself should have written the book, but his final fifteen years of scholarship before retirement were taken up with another project, a bold one: the study of certain correlations of events he had painstakingly found in the vast literature on Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Roman Empire around the beginning of the Christian era. His findings made up the substance of his *Rome and China*, published in 1939.

But well in advance of completion of that book, a good deal of the more exciting content had been made a part of his introductory course. I will not attempt even a capsule review of the aims and results of the book. It is more important to indicate briefly those aspects that found their way into his lectures at least a decade before its publication. As I have doubtless made clear by this time, Teggart was entranced by parallels or conjunctures among ostensibly separated histories. The notion that a relationship between Rome and China existed in classical times was, of course, not original with Teggart; nor did he, even in class, pretend that it was. What he had set himself to do was to convert a general realization into a series of verifiable connections extending from the borders of China to those of the Roman Empire. He wanted to show that precisely datable events in eastern Asia—military engagements, migrations, invasions, signal interruptions of trade routes across Asia—had demonstrable, verifiable, datable repercussions all the way from China's borders to that great area east of the Rhine and north of the Danube in which the Germanic peoples lived for so long and from which they launched their historic invasions of the Roman Empire.

What Teggart wanted to show beyond any reasonable doubt was that these invasions were not generated by simple tribal decision, or by insufficiencies of food supply, or by changes in the climate, but rather by a chain-like succession of events beginning in eastern Asia and terminating in the Germanic invasions of Rome. He sought to verify his conclusions, positively and negatively, either taking a given invasion of Rome and then working back to the precipitating event on China's border, or beginning with an event on that border and working across to the West, to discover whether in due time a significant invasion of Rome occurred. In the beginning, as I understood it, he had taken the

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whole period of the invasions for his study, but the sheer magnitude of the task, the vast number of histories which had to be examined, forced him to focus on a shorter period, one of a little more than a century.

How successful Teggart was in his bold and vast enterprise I cannot say. I admire his book, but for personal reasons I have never been able to enjoy it, to really read it. There is nothing felicitous about the style, given the plethora of compactly identified dates, peoples, wars, and place-names. Astute response to the book requires an immense interest in, and knowledge of, a substantial number of histories stretching from China to Rome. As I recall, there were relatively few reviews, which is understandable in view of the range and variety of knowledge required, and of these I can think of only a couple of genuinely favorable ones. Teggart was, I know, deeply disappointed by the book's reception. He had put such immense quantities of energy into it, such passionate belief in its importance, that he could not have helped thinking that a large and immediately responsive audience waited for its publication.

But putting aside the book itself, there was no mistaking the interest and response of students when he brought to the fore the larger and more easily assimilable themes of his research into the subject. He believed with all his heart that he had indeed approached historical data, for the first time, with the method of the scientist instead of that of the writer of historical narratives. And most of us in the class believed this too, though we would have been hard put to offer evidence for our belief. It is enough to say here that, irrespective of the validity and final assessment of the book, its contents, translated into the language of undergraduate lectures, made as much impression on students as did the other problems he dealt with.

As must surely be evident by this time, Teggart was keenly interested in, actually obsessed by, the possibility of a genuine science of history. He had acquired that interest as a youth, during the last third of the nineteenth century when history-as-science was very much in the intellectual atmosphere, especially in Germany. Early on, however, Teggart came to realize that what was meant by the word "scientific" when applied to history was nothing more than scrupulous use of documents and records, along with as high a degree of objectivity as could be reached. Such qualities do indeed belong in science, as in scholarship generally, but they hardly give distinctive identity to science. How, Teggart came to ask, can the historian work with his data in such a way as to achieve results comparable to those in the physical sciences? This was a question that students heard often in his course, and they also heard his answer: go to the data with a question or problem in mind, formulate a hypothesis, and, through repeated subjection of the hypothesis to relevant bodies of data—wherever they are to be found, in the past or the present—emerge with an explanation that will have the same probability that we now expect in a physical science and that can, moreover, be tested by others interested in the same problem. Such a procedure involves a method and an anticipated result utterly different from the simple, conventional narrative. It is evident that Teggart's opposition to the narrative sprang as much from his desire for a genuine science of history as from his recognition of the inescapably plural character of time and history in the world.

Some might think that in the course Teggart gave for undergraduates, students would have been better served by smaller, more directly manageable problems than those I have used for illustration here. I don't agree. The most important thing that can happen to any mind is that it be stretched, and the earlier in life the better. Once stretched, the mind will never retract to its original size. Teggart was an impressive stretcher of minds.

Like most vigorous and creative minds, Teggart had his quirks and paradoxes. Vocally, in the abstract, he was antifeminist to the core. But this philosophy notwithstanding, one of his earliest and most lasting appointments was a woman, Margaret T. Hodgen, who made a highly respected place for herself as teacher and scholar. No decision about the department was made without Teggart's inquiring into her views on the subject. Precisely the same respect governed his association with other women on the Berkeley faculty, of whom an uncommonly large number, at least by the affirmative action criteria

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of that day, held full professorships, all of them notable scholars and scientists. In his committee and other relationships with faculty women, there was never a trace of condescension or exaggerated masculine courtesy (the two are of course the same). But in principle he remained antifeminist so far as universities were concerned, and he was never reluctant to impress that principle upon me when the occasion arose in office conversation.

Needless to say, given Teggart's academic generation, he had other prejudices. He was the quintessential WASP, as were a great many faculty members in American universities before the late 1930s. In the privacy of his office he was quite capable of venting some of these WASP prejudices, but, as with women on faculties, they were pretty much in the abstract. In a decade of close association with Teggart, never once did I see any of these prejudices descend upon an individual, whether student or faculty. A man of prejudice, yes, but also a man of unvarying, unflagging academic honor.

Politically, he was a distinct conservative. Many thought this incongruous, given his rather notorious heresies in matters of teaching and scholarship. Perhaps it was incongruous, but we have learned that some of the most superbly creative minds in the arts and sciences have also been politically conservative, even reactionary. During the early years of my association with Teggart I was a rather ardent New Dealer. Teggart was anything but, and he never missed an opportunity to lay out Franklin Delano Roosevelt and all his works for my benefit. I was not surprised that he supported Landon for the presidency in 1936 and doubtless voted for him, but I did find somewhat astonishing his prediction, just before the election, that Landon would win. Perhaps he trusted the *Literary Digest* poll.

He had a deep dislike of the military and of every form of regimentation or hierarchy springing from the military mind. His best known lectures dealt with the destructive impact, throughout history, of war and the military upon the family and other units of the social order. He frequently cited the steady decline of the Roman family and its *patria potestas* under the continuing buffets of military leaders, beginning with Gaius Marius and continuing through the Caesars, to illustrate this historical relationship between war and kinship. Yet notwithstanding all this, Teggart was one of the first on the Berkeley campus to see and call attention to the menace that Nazi Germany represented in the West and Japan in the East. Nor did he believe it incumbent on him to keep these views out of his lectures. He was no pacifist, no isolationist!

I have mentioned Teggart's extraordinary learning. There are, however, interesting and sometimes inexplicable gaps in the minds of all scholars, however erudite, and Teggart was no exception. I find it extraordinary today that he never referred to Vico in class or, so far as I can tell, in any of his books or articles. He could so aptly have placed Vico with Hume and Turgot in a chapter of his *Theory of History* that lauds these two for early insights into the pluralism of history and the necessity for the scholar to proceed from a concrete question or problem. But I never heard so much as a spoken reference to Vico, and Teggart could be lavish in his praise of others, especially if they lived in the past. Deeply read though he was in the political and social thought of modern Europe, he seems never to have read Alexis de Tocqueville, to whom I had to find my own late way. The same holds for Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Ferdinand Toennies, whom I also had to reach on my own and in whose writings he could have found, here and there at least, valuable support for some of his own controversial views.

He knew most of the major languages, including Greek and Latin, and did work in all of them. But it was English scholarship, particularly that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that he admired the most. Germanic learning, despite the thousands of volumes it produced every decade from the early nineteenth century on, Teggart chose to regard as "imitative." Scratch a German thinker or scholar, he would say, and you will usually find an English or Scotch mind. Some of this disdain for German scholarship can be seen in the long review he wrote for the *Saturday Review of Literature* of Spengler's *Decline of the West* when it was published by Alfred Knopf in this country. Teggart was not

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impressed by the parade of learning that Spengler managed, barely managed—a parade that seems to have overwhelmed most American readers—and to this day I regard Teggart's assessment as the soundest written in America. He was almost equally critical of Toynbee's *Study of History*, beginning in the 1930s when the first three volumes of that work appeared. As I noted above, Toynbee, in one of the final volumes, cited Teggart's *Processes of History* as a formative influence on his thinking about comparative history. If Teggart was aware of this impact of his book, he never mentioned it, and it assuredly did not affect his negative judgment of the Toynbee volumes he read before his death.

That points up another quality in Teggart that I thought then, and still do, largely unfortunate: his almost total dismissal of any work (much of it very good) done by contemporaries which had at least some affinity with his own contributions. His outlook on what historians and social scientists were doing was dour, to say the least, and he could be as ill-tempered about some occasional favorable acknowledgment of his ideas that I might find in my reading as he could about any criticism of them. This generally dismissive attitude toward the work of others in the scholarly world was set in a personal reclusiveness that became more and more complete during the years when I knew and saw a great deal of him. Before 1940, when Merle Curti (I think) was responsible for Teggart's being invited to present a major paper at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, I don't think he had attended a single such meeting or any other conference since the creation of his department in 1919. When I recall his evident pleasure, his gratitude indeed, after he returned from that AHA meeting in 1940, it seems all the sadder that he had so completely cut himself off from the rest of the world. He had a great deal to give that could be given effectively only in contexts of personal give-and-take.

Except for his immediate family, Teggart's aloofness from others was almost total. There were faculty members who had been his friends from the time he had first come to Berkeley—William Popper in Semitic Languages, George P. Adams in Philosophy, Eugene I. MacCormac in History, others—whom he spoke of to me in his office with deep respect and affection. Only rarely, though, did he see them. And such friendship did not ever, to the best of my knowledge, extend to use of first names. I never once heard him called by his first name, even by those who had known and admired him for decades. There was something about Teggart that discouraged, that stopped dead, any overture based upon a desire for intimacy or for what Teggart would only have perceived as familiarity. Familiarity, he used to impress upon me, "doesn't *breed* contempt; it *is* contempt." Nor did he deviate from that principle. Even those he had known longest and most affectionately at Berkeley he never addressed other than by surname. Never in ten years of very close and congenial association did he use my first name in addressing me.

Not that he was in any way cold in spirit or manner. Far from it! Irish (he had been born in Belfast, Ireland, coming to this country with his family at college age), he exemplified most of the traits we commonly attribute to the people of Erin. Among these, inevitably, was capacity for fierce, volcanic anger when provoked by some enormity on the world scene or in academe. Even so, he probably controlled more temper in a month than most of us do in a year. His opinions and judgments tended, naturally, to be unqualified and set in marble. Of Teggart it used to be said that when he changed his mind the earth shook. He suffered neither fools nor foolish ideas gladly, and one always felt more secure entering his office when there was good and manifest reason for entering. Small talk was for others, not him, as I learned early on from my own (short-lived) indulgence in it. But if there was Irish temper and obstinacy, there was also Irish wit and humor. The first could be used cuttingly on occasion as I dare say most of us close to him had reason to know. But it took other forms too, with humor the only object. Sometimes I could hear his laugh half way down the hall from his office; he laughed as only those do who love it but find too few occasions for it in the world. And he had generous capacity for friendship; not easily begun, to be sure, but full and rich once it had begun.

Our friendship extended through World War II. He wrote to me regularly when I was

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out in the Pacific—warm, almost affectionate, always reassuring letters that did much for my morale, given the uncertainty about the postwar future of the tiny department from which he had retired and in which I held the untenured rank of assistant professor. I had several conversations with him after I came back to Berkeley in late 1945, and although they were much like those of earlier years, they were not the same. Quite apart from what war can do to convert separation into a certain diffidence, if not the beginnings of estrangement, there was a deep division in our small department on the matter of its future: whether to remain the same despite his retirement or become, as I strongly argued for, the nucleus of Berkeley's first Sociology department. On academic grounds Teggart was not himself unsympathetic to my position, or at least not in the beginning. But my senior colleague, Margaret T. Hodgen, was strongly, bitterly opposed to the transformation. To Teggart what mattered most was loyalty, and since Margaret Hodgen had served his department ably and loyally for more than two decades, Teggart believed that his loyalty must go to her—for which I honor him to this day. But close association between Teggart and me became increasingly strained, and finally ceased altogether. Months after the rupture I read about his death from cancer in the Berkeley newspaper, and I realized with a sudden pang that I hadn't even known of his illness.

Little Fictions, Little Truths

WILLIAM STAFFORD

The world is upside down in the eye
they say—a lens turns it over.
You can turn it back with a lens—and fall
when you walk on the world the way it is.

One fiction at a time will do, if it's
big enough, or small enough:
all the power of the sun you can turn aside
by your Indian telescope, the shade of your hand.

A mad dog fears water, and froth in the mouth
puts fear wherever it goes. People
scream, and their scream is the sound of water,
drowning everything else—

That's a big country, the fictions around us,
the little truths.

● WILLIAM STAFFORD teaches literature at Lewis and Clark College. A new collection of his poems, *Stories That Could Be True*, was published last year.

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To A. A. Akhmatova

Joseph Brodsky

Roosters begin to cry, to clap;
boots begin to pound on the sidewalk;
the horse's emerald eyes begin to spark;
contemporaries will all pass away.

The flageolet starts singing above the alley;
the pistol begins laughing on the canal;
the glass thunders in the windowsill;
the room grows oddly bright.

And darting, touching the bushes,
invincible troops of suffocating heat will
slide along the park's close shaven edge
like shadows of the egg-shaped crafts.

This way, the twenty first, the golden one,
will begin; on the sunlit path,
obscenities answering its questions,
its steam sealing in the light.

And on the Champs des Mars, before nightfall,
you will appear perfectly alone,
in the same blue dress you always wore,
but without admirers for good, without us.

Only a roll of paper in your hand;
a taxi will be hovering in the distance;
the bright water will lap close by;
telephone wires sag to the asphalt.

You'll lift up your magnificent face—
a great laugh or commemorative word,

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a deadened sound on the steaming bridge—
will instantly agitate this void.

I haven't seen, I will not see your tears;
I will not hear the rustling wheels
taking you off to the gulf, to forests
across this land without a monument to you.

In your warm room, without books, as I recall,
without admirers, and surely not for them,
leaning your temples in your hand,
you'll write of us obliquely.

"Oh Lord," you'll begin to say. "This
desolate air is just the flesh of souls
that abandoned their calling,
but not Your new creation!"

1962

Translated by JONATHAN BRENT

● JOSEPH BRODSKY, the émigré Russian poet, teaches in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of Michigan.

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The Tainted Fork

RUTH GAY

There is a pair of sentences that anyone over thirty heard with guaranteed regularity during his childhood. With only slight variations the pattern was: "Why aren't you eating your spinach? Think of the poor starving children of Armenia [China, Turkey, India]!" Unconvincing though its logic may be, this two-part formula has become embedded in our thinking. The first part of the proposition requires the child to do something unpleasant, however tiny the act. The implied consequences in the second part are enormous, or at least enormous numbers are being conjured up. In balance are two quantities that are pushed into a sequential connection by the force of grammar. The rather hazy relationship between them has never been logically established, but the emotional sense that there is a connection, and that by making some slight sacrifice the diner will somehow correct injustice in the world, remains an unshakable and unexamined predicate of many later political positions.

The most eloquent spokesman for this point of view is Michael Harrington, who in his latest book, *The Vast Majority*,* describes his feelings as he trundled his oversized conscience around to the poorest parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is a hard and true fact, he points out, that one-fourth of the inhabitants of this globe are malnourished or starving, and Harrington candidly reports his response to what he saw as a sequence of horror, disgust, compassion, and finally anger at the poor, in his travels through the "South" of the world.

We are in a less hopeful time now than in the days when Harrington was a young contributor to the *Catholic Worker*—a time when problems seemed to have solutions which flowed from direct action by The People, or by a government acting for The People. He and his friends hoped for the inauguration of what he calls a "reign of human niceness." Yet somehow it was not to be. As it turned out, things got more complicated, and technology more sophisticated and expensive. Revolutionary leaders in Africa fought one another over tribal differences instead of uniting against imperialists. American workers were also imperialists as the "unwitting partners" of their employers in the exploitation of the Third World. And multinationals have developed a computerized system using satellite communications, which takes account of, and profits from, daily shifts in the world currency market. If we add to Harrington's firsthand account the stray fact that the Third World will need a billion jobs by the year 2000, a bare generation away, or the news that some of the technical accomplishments in Western industrialized societies have begun to boomerang, it must bring every right-minded person to the brink of despair.

Although Harrington is essentially a political thinker, when he is confronted with such global misery he begins to use moral rather than political language, requiring Americans to be "chastened, humbled" in the search for change. As the leader of the remnants of American Socialism, he is a surprising spokesman for this shift in emphasis from the political to the private but he is only one among an increasing number who find the answer to the world's troubles in messages of personal

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responsibility. Because so many of the Third World problems turn on food, their solution takes on a particular finger-pointing urgency to those who live in a society of plenty.

In the enthusiastic attack on malnutrition and its brother, hunger, there is hardly a solution that has not been tried. International health agencies have sent in medical teams; government loans have been advanced; outright gifts of food and technical aid have flowed from haves to have-nots; the sciences have been enlisted to improve crops, to fight pests, and to analyze disease. And now, in the cold light of the seventies, it has all been found wanting. The famous Green Revolution, for example, which was to produce a high-yield, pest-resistant rice, is criticized for requiring exactly the kind of cost-intensive technology that benefits only the already rich farmers in the Philippines and other areas of the Pacific and Asia. As a further drawback, it shifts the local peasants from mixed farming to a high-risk one-crop approach, depriving them of the natural balance of foods that came out of their traditional gardens. Last, if not least, they simply don't like the new rice because it's gummy, and won't eat it if there is an alternative.

In Africa, too, change has brought an unforeseen chain of disaster in its wake. Building the Aswân Dam has interfered with the millennia-old natural irrigation process that spread the fertile Nile silt over the adjacent lands in its annual rising. Now the reduced water in the channel has raised the river's salinity, destroying fish in Egypt, not to mention what has happened to bouillabaisse in Marseilles. In the Sahel, the desert borderlands of West Africa, the disastrous consequences of the drought of the early seventies are traced back to overpopulation of herds owned by formerly nomadic peoples who were encouraged by international agencies to settle and establish permanent pastures. In a protected situation, the cattle overgrazed the vegetation and used up the water supply, leaving the new settlements helpless when the rains failed.

Then there is rampant tuberculosis among the Eskimo that followed contact with the white man and the shift from a traditional diet to the processed foods that were sold at the trading post. And in tropical areas the introduction of powdered milk has encouraged mothers to give up breast-feeding—with disastrous results, since supplies of imported baby foods are irregular, often contaminated or spoiled, or used incorrectly. The final effect of this particular modernizing effort is probably an increase in infant disease and mortality. The American liberal begins to find, like a modern Midas in reverse, that everything he touches turns into disaster. Even a minor effort, if it upsets some delicate balance, can produce a major disturbance.

Yet, despite these lessons, the impulse to "do something" is hard to resist, and lies behind the increasing popularity of a new kind of book, one that binds the solution to these overwhelming problems together in a personal change of diet. As in the two sentences I quoted at the beginning of this article, the logical connection does not seem altogether persuasive. But many Americans and Europeans feel the need to act in response to the intolerable statistics and intolerable conditions that are, nonetheless, helplessly tolerated by millions on this earth. At such a juncture, self-denial and charity become expressions of feeling. As witness, for example, Oxfam, the British relief organization, and the many Christian relief groups in Western European countries.

This personal approach to politics surfaced most dramatically during the student explosions of the 1960s, when styles of dress and food and habitation became badges that conveyed symbolically a universe of belief. In 1969 the first *Whole Earth Catalog* institutionalized these symbols for recent college graduates who no longer had ready-made arenas for political expression. As a document the *Whole Earth Catalog* was a bridge between the political sixties and the morally anguished seventies, and in retrospect it reads like a prophetic statement of the direction that activism would take.

The "whole earth" attitude of the sixties, in fact, breathed new life into the old-fashioned nostrum purveyors, ever ready to adapt their message to the idea of the moment. Their eternal appeal lies, of course, not in the content of their product, but in the form of their bargain. Who can resist the confident promise of perpetual blooming health, if not quite perpetual life, in return for only a little effort, a small purchase, a new idea? By now

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hordes of hucksters and preachers have discovered that they can gain a hearing by addressing themselves to the universal preoccupation with food.

Outstanding for absurdity in this category is Dick Gregory, whose main claim to our attention rests on his reducing his weight from 288 to 97 pounds. His method, as recounted in *Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' with Mother Nature,*° was simple: not eating—or, as he calls it, in the inflated language of these tracts, "fasting." He makes an obeisance to social consciousness with a sprinkling of one-liners from his civil rights days, and adds a rather vague program to get Americans to "think" about the "traditional American diet." Here he is no longer advocating political action, but sheer self-preservation. Having described the swollen ankles, falling hair, and other distasteful ailments that flow from the unexamined American way of life, he quickly concentrates on the rewards of a diet confined to raw fruits and a regimen of regular enemas.

Implicit in much of this literature is the premise that if "everyone" would do "it," the world would be a better place. For some, the persuasiveness of these schemes lies in the perfectly irrelevant but nonetheless perfect logic of the self-contained system. Adele Davis, one of the harbingers of the natural food movement, once quite solemnly explained, while extolling the merits of whole grains, that the French lost World War II because they ate white bread and the Germans won because they ate dark bread. Whether she stopped reading the newspapers after 1940 to protect her theory is not revealed. Nonetheless these tidy systems are comforting as long as they are not tested against reality, and for entertainment and uplift they are as good as a sermon.

Many of the Eastern religious sects also begin their proselytizing through diet, promising to introduce the convert to a new level of consciousness if he will change his eating habits. Yet this linking of permitted and forbidden foods with a spiritual state is neither new nor confined to the East. The Catholic fast days, the Mormon taboo on stimulants, the Christian Scientist prohibition of liquor —all are systems in which food is a religious symbol. Most recently the guardians of the Lubavitcher Mitzvah Mobiles have been seeking to bring recalcitrant Jews back to the fold by explaining how easy it is to manage a kosher kitchen. Here, too, the change in eating habits is seen as the first step in the reclamation of the soul.

Varied though these appeals are, they account for only a small number of the books on the shelves. Occupying the center of the field is a substantial body of literature that is serious, well documented, and inescapably gloomy. It concerns itself with three kinds of large problems: (1) the political and economic dimensions of world poverty, especially undernourishment; (2) the ecological pollution of the earth's atmosphere and the depletion of its resources; (3) the drastic tampering with food produced in highly industrialized countries, with its immediate threat to health. Two current book titles, *Eating May Be Hazardous to Your Health* and *Poisons in Your Food,* in fact, neatly summarize the mood.

The long and growing bibliography ranges from close examination of the food balance of particular areas to the angry discussion of what is happening to the life and health of the average American citizen. Reports of the Club of Rome, Robert L. Heilbroner's *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect,* the Senate Committee's 1977 report, *Dietary Goals for the United States,* the National Research Council's *World Food and Nutrition Study* (1977) take a long-range, if grave, view of these problems and manage a tone of scientific objectivity. But most of the literature is polemical in nature and programmatic in conclusion. These are no abstract speculations; they are calls to action.

Few are asking us to share our cloaks, like Saint Martin, with the rest of the world, but the moral pressure to abstain from meat grows with every publishing season. Best known, and by now a classic in the field, is Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet,*° which concisely summarizes the evidence against the diet of the Western industrialized societies based on high meat consumption and refined foods. In a cunningly constructed argument that appeals both to our sense of moral responsibility and our in-

° Harper & Row. $1.95.

° Ballantine Books. $5.95.

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stinct for self-preservation, the author leads us to the inescapable conclusion that we must push for a government support program which will make it profitable for farmers to convert from feed to food, and shift our eating habits from meat to plant food. A testimonial to the persuasiveness of this book has been the popularity of its companion volume, *Recipes for a Small Planet.*

In a more violent key is Paul Brodeur's *The Zapping of America,*° an exposé of the dangers inherent in the indiscriminate use of microwaves in communications as well as cooking. Writing in the old consumer-advocate tradition, Brodeur urges us to take notice of the invisible forces that may be doing us incalculable harm. Not far behind him in their vehemence of expression are the chemists and nutritionists, who see the health of the nation being sacrificed to the greed of the food production industry. Particularly persuasive is the biochemist Ross Hume Hall, who warns us, in *Food for Nought,*† against the consequences of the "technologic",production of food by agribusiness and its successful marketing through the powerful medium of television. He does not stop at descriptions of "lifeless bread," hormone-fattened animals, or the vanishing of plant varieties. He also points out how research at agricultural colleges supports industrial profits rather than humanitarian goals.

Pessimists cannot help seeing the technological developments since 1940 as leading to a net deterioration in our health and safety. The main villain in the picture is chemistry, which has made possible the chemical fertilizers, the additives, and ultimately the synthetic foods that are being produced in increasing quantities. A spokesman for the food-flavoring industry explained recently that the flavors of certain products, such as grapefruit and tomato juice, have for so long been combined with the metallic aftertaste of the cans they come in that consumers neither recognize nor accept their true qualities. For "grapefruit" flavor, then, the food industry now has to add the metallic taste to natural grapefruit.

But every generation of technicians has its own goals, and the industry is bored with merely reproducing nature. The new frontier is "fantasy flavor," which has no counterpart in the vegetable kingdom and is altogether the product of the chemist's imagination. A few of these fantasies have been with us for a while: those in bubble gum, in Coca-Cola, and in Hostess Twinkies. Not far behind on the timetable is fantasy food, such as the "chicken" made out of soy protein, astronaut energy sticks, and analogue cheeses. "Synthetic foods," a representative of the industry assures us, "can actually be better than the real thing. It's well known that natural food products have lots of toxins. We eliminate them in synthetics." To a certain extent, synthetic foods are already with us. Vitamins can now be produced so cheaply in the laboratory that utterly worthless breakfast cereals made up entirely of sugar and starch can, in the course of their manufacture, be sprayed with enough vitamins to carry labels indicating that they meet impressive levels of required daily vitamin intake.

The socially conscious man, bombarded as he is with news of disaster, both physical and spiritual, must feel that every forkful of food he raises to his lips is tainted. Either he is consuming an unfair portion of the world's resources or, even worse, he is poisoning himself. In this dilemma there is every reason to shake loose from the food habits of a lifetime. Daily transactions take on a heady sense of moral engagement if he has to think before reaching for the bromated loaf of bread, the dyed bacon, the embalmed cheese. And since we all know that every pound of beef equals seven pounds of grain and soy, an incalculable moral gain is induced by a vegetarian dinner.

We are seeing, then, a curious turn in middle-class liberal politics, away from a concern with political structures to a preoccupation with ethical issues. There is a kind of liberal fatalism now about the SALT talks, intercontinental missiles, the menace of Euro-Communism. But the old passions can still be engaged in the question of nuclear energy, on the grounds of its immediate personal danger rather than its ultimate threat to the balance of power. What once would have been the classicial issue—whether the industry should be under state or private control—never even surfaces. Lobbyists and ad hoc political groups channel their indignation

° W. W. Norton. $10.00.
† Vintage Books. $3.95.

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against immediate targets such as agribusiness, microwave proliferation, the cereal makers, the media—while avoiding theoretical or ideological discussions. In the same way, Harrington's survey of Third World poverty is a perfect barometer for this shift in emphasis. Although Harrington implies that democratic societies can cope with these problems better than others, essentially his is a hand-wringing report with only the vaguest hint that politics might figure in the solution. The moral dimensions of the problem are what overwhelm him and lead him to seek moral, personally satisfying courses of action.

The increasing crush of books linking personal change to world betterment is, however, no measure of popular involvement in this question. Out in TV land and in the supermarket, shoppers are oblivious both to the problems of protein deprivation in the Third World and to any lurking menace to themselves. We cannot hide from the fact that these are middle-class preoccupations. When diet becomes the concern of those who are not actually hungry, it is from motives of self-interest. Weight Watchers is a commercial venture with 1.6 million adherents from many social strata, very few of whom connect their abstinence with a redistribution of the world food supply. Similarly the newly popular, if not illogical, conclusion that fasting is the "ultimate diet"—as in Shirley Ross's glum book, *Fasting: The Super Diet*°—has no visible social content. The Weight Watchers, the fasters, the low carbohydrate or high protein or big bulk champions are dieting today to enjoy new pleasures tomorrow. In the same way, the natural food believers, the vegetarians, the fellow travelers of various Eastern religions are also using diet as an entering wedge into a personal conversion experience. Although the political man, the dieter, and the mystic are brought together by their interest in food, they have divergent, even contradictory, purposes. What distinguishes the political man from the others is that he is thinking of the social consequences of his actions.

To all these considerations, however, most Americans are indifferent. The recommendations of the Club of Rome or of the Senate Committee on Dietary Goals are of less moment than the blandishments of modern marketing experts luring the public in a diametrically opposite direction. In a pattern that defies common sense, the specialists end by preaching to the converted, describing the dark consequences of our profligate ways, while the mass media continue to extol the benefits of "convenience" and disposability. The far-reaching consequences of the media's romance of the good life are seen in the radical changes in our eating patterns. The craze for fast food, for example, has begun to take over school cafeterias, where managers are driven to imitate soft buns and thick shakes while sneaking in some nutritive additives. At home, snacks are supplanting formal meals, as instant food transforms not only the content but also the style of American eating. Not without reason are students of the American family wondering what the abandonment of the mealtime ritual will do to family life.

Ross Hume Hall's warning about the sapping of the American will by the media should not be discounted as hyperbole. As in a war, market-research agencies pinpoint their targets with hairline accuracy. Burger King, for example, has just decided, on the basis of an expensive study, to move in on "the six to ten set." Part of its strategy for 1978 includes spending 10 percent of its $40 million advertising budget on toys for its new clientele.

Paradoxically, one of the few times that families do get together for a meal is when they go out for dinner to a fast-food restaurant. Becoming more ambitious in variety and more elaborate in decor, the chains have been steadily pushing individual owner-operated restaurants out of business. Beginning in 1978 McDonald's began to open 350 new outlets a year, and Burger King, now up to its two thousandth, lags behind with only 300 a year projected. In time, no town or hamlet in America will be without one, and the paradox continues. In their latest stage of evolution, the fast-food chains, according to one architectural critic, have become the custodians of the old values. Now that our houses and cultural institutions have taken to the "sleek and industrial" look, he points out, "the fast food stand and the gasoline station have donned the mansard roofs, turning the tables entirely." Despite the asphalt deserts dotted with giant garbage cans in the back parking

° Ballantine Books. $1.75.

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lots, the facades of the fast-food restaurants have a ludicrously decorous approach, with carefully tended shrubbery and flowers. "Mom" and "Dad" and the rest of the picture-book family are being coaxed to become part of the fantasy stage set. They may have to put up with glaring lights, blaring sound, and the designedly cramped booths that increase turnover, but the chains are offering them a big welcome and promising "Dad" that he can be the last of the big spenders and still get change from a five-dollar bill.

Fast food is, however, only the public form of a more pervasive domestic phenomenon, "junk food," which seems to enjoy instantaneous success in whatever part of the world it is introduced. With a kind of black humor, a few writers have sought to celebrate junk food—most recently Michael S. Lasky with *The Complete Junk Food Book*,* an inventory of some of the more perilous items in the supermarkets as well as a "Traveler's Guide to Eating Across America." This good-humored cicerone includes all the heartwarming statistics that no longer surprise us, such as the fact that advertising for supermarket products comes to $3.87 billion a year. Lasky tells all about the history of our favorite products—how the industry gets us to buy, what goes into junk foods—and offers a product rating of nutrient levels. But despite his mastery of the field, he remains by his own confession a "junk food junkie," an abdication that may be one route to sanity in the face of overwhelming forces.

Another way may be to take a very long look back. Ann Scott Beller, a physical anthropologist, does just that in a new study, *Fat and Thin: A Natural History of Obesity*,† which traces the anatomical and physiological development of Homo sapiens, analyzing the varieties of human shapes as well as the almost immutable nature of these varieties. If it doesn't make some of us happier about the way we look, it may make us wiser about what we think we can accomplish in one lifetime on a frame and constitution handed on to us after millennia of evolution. In the midst of the passions now aroused by the uses of food, Ann Beller's dispassionate account of how people have come to look as they do, and what differences in climate, sex, age, and even the seasons do to our needs, adds yet another and much less malleable set of considerations to the problem.

In the face of so much information and moral pressure, the responsible citizen finds that a diet which goes beyond crunching wheat berries and the "ecological eclair" —see Francis Sheridan Goulart's book of that title, subtitled *Recipes for Sugarless Treats*°—is positively immoral. What is tempting about the flight into the personal solution is that it is visible, slightly self-punitive, and seemingly a form of direct action. It is also politically ineffectual. Its only public meaning, if any, is as a demonstration of faith—in the manner of the early missionaries to Africa who hoped, as much by example as by preaching, to make an impression on the unbelievers, and were cheered by any single soul they captured. In all of Dr. Livingstone's lifetime in Africa, one of his biographers maintains, he made only two converts.

Biologists like Ross Hume Hall and political activists like Frances Lappe have already done better than that, to judge from the sales of their books. But the awesome goals they have set themselves need more than converts, and good resolutions, and eating spinach for the sake of the starving Indians—or not eating anything. Global politics implies new strategies for activists in their dogged fight for a more rational distribution of the world's resources. Whether the books will move mountains remains to be seen. In the meantime there is no lack of reading matter.

* McGraw-Hill. $7.95.

† Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.00.

° Collier Books. $3.50.

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Edwin Arlington Robinson

The Prince of Heartachers

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Edwin Arlington Robinson's stock does not stand very high at present and is not likely to rise. His image is well summed up by my own copy of *Collected Poems* (1930), an edition published before his death and not containing his final long poems; yet even without them the book runs to 1,007 pages. I purchased it in 1963 for two dollars at a secondhand bookstore in Northampton, Massachusetts. The plain dust jacket and the pages are agreeably yellowing; the print—like the old Macmillan complete Hardy—is not the most attractive nor is it even particularly legible. Inside it someone has attached a clipped-out picture of Robinson's cottage at the MacDowell Colony. The someone was probably Mrs. William Millar Cochran to whom, on July 8, 1932, the book was presented by the "Executive Board, Northampton Women's Club." In other words, it is undeniably the sort of book that belongs firmly on one's shelf, and on no occasion is it to be taken down and read. As Robinson himself wrote in an early poem about George Crabbe, "Give him the darkest inch your shelf allows."

Although the long poems which make up over half the volume are often blamed for putting readers off, it is not evident that—apart from a few anthology standbys, inevitably "Richard Cory" and "Miniver Cheevy"—Robinson's shorter poems now fare much better. And although he has his accorded moment in the American literature survey course (one or perhaps two classes discussing his relationship to naturalism, or his treatment of character), it is of the sort dutifully given to another American writer, to the author of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. This treatment is of course an unfortunate mistake. Robinson, like William Dean Howells, is a wonderful artist, and as we have hardly begun to appreciate the pleasures of Howells's novels and memoirs, so have we hardly begun to find our way around Robinson's poems. But Robinson was an odder man and artist than Howells, and if it is difficult enough to talk interestingly about how Howells's "middleness" affects his narratives and the kinds of resolutions they do and don't have, it is even harder to make sense of Robinson's poems.

Thus the survey course finds it expedient to consider them as more or less adequate vehicles for big ideas about destiny and mortality, which big ideas, when abstracted from the poems where supposedly they figure, are pretty tedious fare. Unlike "modernist" work such as Eliot's, Pound's, or Hart Crane's (I use the term modernist here simply to designate a dense verbal surface that frequently feels obscure at first reading and beyond), Robinson's poems look to be understandable, their diction plain, their forms—sonnet, quatrain, blank verse—familiar and unthreatening. "I suppose that I have always depended rather more on context than on vocabulary for my poetical effects, and this offense has laid me open to the charge of oversubtlety on the part of the initiated and of dullness on the part of the dull," he wrote to a professor of English in 1917. No wonder most professors proceed directly to informing their restless students, who couldn't care less about Robinson, what that poet is presumably "saying."

To insist, as I am going to, that the life and challenge of Robinson's poetry lies in its way

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of saying rather than in the truth or relevance or wisdom of the idea communicated (frequently it is difficult to identify what exactly the "idea" amounts to) sounds unadventurous. As with any poet, where else should one look than to the particular sequences of words which somehow constitute a living voice? Yet Robinson's voice is often a consummately dead one, so discussion of the poems is all the more likely to take place with only cursory attention paid to those particular sequences. There is more point to making this insistence about Robinson than about either Yeats or Hardy, his two most significant poetic contemporaries. With Yeats, the verbal surface is inevitably so arresting and dramatically aggressive in its behavior (as well as replete with gyres and other strange objects) that one is not likely to ignore the words on the page. And while Hardy's surface is typically less agitated, there is—particularly in the "Poems of 1912–13" group and in many other ones early and late—a recognizable human being at the poem's center, brooding, speculating, questioning Nature or the Immanent Will, leaning on a coppice gate at the end of the nineteenth century and wondering what it all means.

Robinson, on the other hand, is invisible, does not in the main write directly out of his personal experience, does not attempt to dramatize the self, as did Yeats and Hardy in their very different ways. In a phrase used about him by a contemporary poet, the late L. E. Sissman, Robinson is "implicit in the inward town," whether of Head Tide, Maine, where he was born, or the "Tilbury Town" of many of his poems. Often this means that we are to listen to a story being told about somebody named Vickery or Flammonde or Richard Cory, in which the teller aspires to a more generalized and objective account than any man in particular could hope for. Robinson's "invisibility" also means that the words of his poems take on a fascinating, sometimes a maddening life of their own, with the illusion that they are operating somehow independently of their creator's will; and that whatever they are engaged in, it is not merely or mainly to make responsible, sympathetically acute statements about a world which lies beyond them. "His life was a revel in the felicities of language," said Frost in his felicitous tribute to Robinson. How strange the word "revel" sounds applied to this soberest and gloomiest of the poets—to the "prince of heartachers," as Frost also called him. Yet it is a profoundly right thing to say, and provides the best way into Robinson's genius.

Of all the modern poets, Edwin Arlington Robinson was the least various in his activities, interests, and aspirations, and if such were the measure of a poet's life he might be judged the least "interesting," a man "almost without biography," as J. V. Cunningham has called him. Born in 1869 in Head Tide, Maine, and moved to Gardiner, Maine, the next year, he was the third son of parents who left him unchristened for six months. His first name was eventually found by drawing lots, on the suggestion of a lady from Arlington whose residing place then became Robinson's middle name. His older brothers, Dean and Herman, undertook careers in medicine and business; both succumbed to drugs and alcohol, failed in their careers, and died prematurely. Robinson himself claimed that all he could ever do was write poetry. As a high school student he became associated with the "Club," a small group of local poets who met to read aloud from their works. In 1891 he entered Harvard as a special student—as Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens were to do later in the decade. Some of his poems were published in the *Advocate*, while his letters home to his boyhood friend Harry DeForest Smith reveal a course of varied, intelligently conducted reading.

Robinson's father died in 1892 and he returned home to a family in serious financial difficulties. His mother died in 1896, the year in which Robinson had printed at his own expense *The Torrent and the Night Before*, his first volume of poems, followed the next year by *The Children of the Night*, a revision and expansion of the earlier volume. His older brother Dean died in 1899 in depressing circumstances, after which Robinson settled in New York for the rest of his life. He spent the early years of this century in desperate financial straits, eventually taking a job as time-checker in the construction of New York City's first subway. But in 1905, the son of President Theodore Roosevelt called his father's attention to Robinson's second book of poems, whereupon the President invited him to the White House (he never went) and after further negotiations installed him as a special

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agent in the New York Customs House at an annual salary of $2,000. "I want you to understand," said Roosevelt, "I expect you to think poetry first and your work in the Customs House second." (Roosevelt also wrote a review of Robinson's poems.) The poet lived up to this injunction as his poems continued to appear; few acts of patronage in American letters look in retrospect as well-chosen as this one. Robinson resigned the post in 1909, but two years later spent the first of his summers at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where through the contributions of friends he was able to spend the remaining summers of his life as a guest.

The Town Down the River (1910) and *The Man Against the Sky* (1916) established Robinson's reputation, which never slipped until after his death. In 1921 his *Collected Poems* won the Pulitzer Prize, the first of three such awards he was to receive. Robinson had now begun to turn his attention to the writing of long poems (an attempt to write plays had been unsuccessful) and for the last fifteen or so years of his life produced relatively few short lyrics, the springs of inspiration (he said) having dried up. Of these long poems the three Arthurian ones, particularly *Tristram* (1927), were more commercially profitable than anything he had done, and he was able to repay most of his debts and remain financially solid until he died in 1935 from an inoperable cancer.

One of the strangest of Robinson's early poems is titled "The Book of Annandale," a longish affair in two parts, ostensibly presenting the responses of a man (Annandale) and then a woman (Damaris) to the death of their respective spouses. Though Annandale has lived happily with his young wife for a few years, he finds himself after her funeral rather calm, less interested in mourning her than in contemplating the book he's been hard at work on for some time. What is in this book? A hard question to answer, as we see by inspecting lines like the following:

> It might be the book;
> Perhaps he might find something in the book;
> But no, there could be nothing there at all—
> He knew it word for word; but what it meant—
> He was not sure that he had written it
> For what it meant; and he was not quite sure
> That he had written it;—more likely it
> Was all a paper ghost. . . .

Yet this book is more real than the wife he has just lost.

It is a curious "poetry" Robinson is effecting here—with its dashes and ellipses and monosyllabic mutterings—that asks to be known "word for word" rather than "For what it meant." Readers of "The Book of Annandale" have rightly found the poem obscure, especially in its second section when Damaris, musing upon her pledge to Argan (her dead husband) not to remarry, now suffers under that pledge in a style like this:

> And had she known the truth
> Of what she felt that he should ask her that,
> And had she known the love that was to be,
> God knew that she could not have told him then.

Granted this "means" something; yet one barely thinks about meaning as, one by one, thirty-six monosyllables march by, creating a puzzling, dislocated apprehension of things. Eventually we find out (though commentators are not in full agreement) that Annandale has written the book for Damaris and that somehow it is a surrogate for himself. Whether or not Annandale earlier proposed to Damaris and was rejected (because of her vow to Argan) is not clear. But the poem becomes extremely animated as it moves to a climactic assertion in which Damaris suddenly understands all:

> There were the words that he had made for her,
> For her alone.
> They were eternal words, and they diffused
> A flame of meaning that men's lexicons
> Had never kindled; they were choral words
> That harmonized with love's enduring chords
> Like wisdom with release; triumphant words
> That rang like elemental orisons
> Through ages out of ages; words that fed
> Love's hunger in the spirit; words that smote;
> Thrilled words that echoed, and barbed words that
> clung;—

This passage makes Yeats's "For words alone are certain good" sound like an understatement. Clearly Robinson is very moved here, has pulled out all the stops to make us feel the marvel of what has happened. Yet what *has* happened? Yvor Winters, writing about the poem, declared annoyedly, "This is not art, but is rather a technique of systematic exasperation." One sympathizes with him,

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and it should be emphasized that it is the verse itself which not only exasperates but also teases us with its hint of something ever about to be revealed.

The "words" of which Annandale has composed his book do all sorts of impressive things: diffuse a flame of meaning, are choral and triumphant, ring like orisons and feed love's hunger, smite and thrill and cling. This diction is perilously close to the sort of "uplift" tradition of the Beauties of Poetry which Robinson staked his career on avoiding. An often-quoted letter about his forthcoming first volume (*The Torrent and the Night Before*) says proudly that "when it comes to 'nightingales and roses' I am not 'in it' nor have I the smallest desire to be," and that he chooses instead to sing "of heaven & hell and now and then of natural things . . . of a more prosy connotation than those generally admitted into the domain of metre." Robinson's attempt to say what he was doing is sincere enough, but needs to be qualified and refined, especially as we try to understand the "prosy connotation" of his work in the context of the nineteenth century's last decade. His contemporaries, Hardy and Yeats and the slightly younger Frost, were each working out their own versions of how to be prosy at the expense of the poetical. Robinson's version is, I am convinced, the most extreme of the four.

Admittedly the Tilbury Town "portrait" poems from *Children of the Night* (1897) eschew the poetical, aspire to flatness and directness of unembroidered statement. Yet the most famous of these—the heavily anthologized "Richard Cory," often used in schools to attract young readers to poetry—wears out its welcome pretty quickly. As Winters commented about the last two lines ("And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,/Went home and put a bullet through his head"), "the poem builds up deliberately to a very cheap surprise ending; but all surprise endings are cheap in poetry." What is really wrong with the surprise ending in the case of a sensibility like Robinson's, is that it does violence to the tenuous, inconclusive, word-filled atmosphere he is so good at charming us with, as Annandale's book charmed Damaris. And the more interesting poems in his first volumes are those which succeed in charming us by casting a spell:

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,—
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,—
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The wind will moan, the leaves will whisper some—
Whisper of her, and strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

Winters, whose vigorous attempts to discriminate among Robinson's poems are surely the best we have, thinks this poem a masterpiece, but in his 1922 review of the *Collected Poems* admitted that there was little to say about it, except that the poem's "longing for death" was its strongest emotion. Theodore Roosevelt also admired "Luke Havergal," while confessing that he didn't know why he liked it. But he was charmed enough to offer Robinson a sinecure; and so was Winters, so am I "charmed" into giving increasingly rapt attention to the voice that weaves its sound effects over the poem's four stanzas. One is tempted to behave in the manner of Edith Sitwell and expatiate on vowel sounds, echoing rhymes, and repetitions; most important there is the dragging pace of utterance:

> But go, and if you trust her she will call.
> Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
> Luke Havergal.

What this poetry *means* (is something called "suicide" being recommended, and just where is the western gate located to which Luke should go?) is less determinate and important than its effect as, by phrase and by pause, it achieves itself. Similar remarks could be made about "The House on the Hill," a villanelle with its repeated "They are all gone away" and "There is nothing more to say." Personal testimony has it that the poem filled one reader with inexpressible sadness until embarrassment set in. And there is "The Pity of the Leaves," a sonnet which begins in this appealingly desolate way:

Vengeful across the cold November moors,
Loud with ancestral shame there came the bleak
Sad wind that shrieked, and answered with a shriek
Reverberant through lonely corridors.

The old man who hears these reverberations hears "Words out of lips that were no more to

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speak—/Words of the past that shook the old man's cheek/Like dead, remembered footsteps on old floors."

The griefs which fill these early and attractively desolate poems are nameless, profound, "reverberant through lonely corridors" where one's buried life rises to confront one or where the past shrieks out of ancestral shame. At roughly age thirty-three, the composer of these lyrics was already a thoroughly haunted man, dedicated to celebrating loss in all its shapes and forms, well on his way to becoming the prince of heartachers of Frost's phrase. But to do this memorably Robinson had to avoid at all costs the clearly defined, clearly accounted-for motive; had instead to exploit the possibilities for melancholy, grief, and pain by using words in ways that always hinted there was something beyond them, something deeper, incapable of being at all adequately rendered by language, by "mere" words.

Robinson once claimed—in just what tone we don't know—that the writing of poems was "the only thing I was any good at." He added, "If I could have done anything else on God's green earth, I never would have written poetry. There was nothing else I could do, and I had to justify my existence." The all-or-nothing remark can be taken straight as a profession of faith; or it can be seen as a complicatedly self-protective and self-mocking way of humorously making the case for what one is. But there was at least one other thing Robinson could do and which over the years he did a great deal of. Alcohol, preferably neat whiskey taken in tumblers, was a necessity for him at certain periods of his life—at other times he gave it up entirely. In his biographical and personal record of Robinson, Chard Powers Smith reports him as admitting, during a stroll at the MacDowell Colony, that when he was young there was a "devil" in his family, and that he knew it would be the devil poetry, not the devil liquor, which "got" him. Smith's anecdotes of bibulous times with the poet suggest that among the other moderns only Hart Crane exceeded Robinson as a drinker, which is to say that it was a factor in Crane's disintegration, while Robinson was able to control it.

It may be dangerously facile to suggest a connection between Robinson's drinking and his attitude toward words, his overriding commitment to the writing of poetry while life went on someplace else, while other people fell in or out of love. But when in "Mr. Flood's Party" the hero sets down his jug at his feet, "as a mother lays her sleeping child/Down tenderly, fearing it may awake," one feels Robinson's heart to be quite simply on his sleeve. In pouring a drink or putting words together into a line of poetry, one has the illusion of freedom—one is on his own. Crane was to write about the "imaged word" which is "the unbetrayable reply/Whose accent no farewell can know." Robinson's early reverence for and rapt absorption in words used for the sake of nothing more than the satisfying combinations they can make, seems to me a similar faith and one that fits appropriately with the kind of drinker one imagines him (on the basis of Smith's account) to have been. Adjusting some lines from *In Memoriam:* words, like liquor, half reveal and half conceal the soul within.

The most sweepingly ambitious attempt to "explain" Robinson's character and see his life and work as all of a piece, is found in Chard Smith's biography, which is sometimes maddeningly pompous and naïve, but sometimes revealing of the man he was so enthralled by. Put very simply, Smith argues that the pattern of Robinson's life and poetry was determined by his falling in love with Emma Shepherd, a young Maine woman who in 1888 married Robinson's brother Herman, she having been seduced into the physical, away from the pure love which existed or should have existed between her and young "Win." Smith says, rather melodramatically, that at the moment when Emma became engaged to Herman while Robinson sat alone in his vacation cottage at Boothbay Harbor, "American literature turned a corner." He goes on to read most of Robinson's poems by plugging them into the hidden drama he feels is really their subject: the relationships among these three lovers.

Smith likes to explain poems by using them as illustrations of the secret life he thinks he has discovered Robinson to have led. If this procedure seems morally dubious, it is also critically barren as far as leading to useful observations about how, in the particular case, Robinson is an arresting user of words. Yet—and again with Hardy and Yeats in mind—one sees how the personally unrevealing sur-

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face of Robinson's poems, in which no "I" displays the wounds we may take to belong to their author, might drive an interpreter to argue that there must be depths, secrets, profundities where these surface goings-on assume important meanings. To be fair to Smith, he does not attempt to include all Robinson's poems within his explanatory scheme; even so, it is impossible to be at all satisfied with being asked continually to think about entities named Herman, Emma, and "Win" as we read arrangements of words.

My own understanding of Robinson's temperament and character would begin rather by considering his praise of another poet, in one of the letters he wrote home from Harvard to Harry DeForest Smith:

> Excepting *The Task* I have read little during the past week. I wonder why it is that I like Cowper as I do? Something tells me that he is not, and never will be, one of the really great poets, although in occasional passages he is well nigh unsurpassable . . . . He is popularly and justly, I suppose, called feminine; but human nature has a word to say regarding such matters, and a little sympathy is not likely to be wasted upon this poet. His timidity was a disease, and the making of verse and rabbit-hutches, together with gardening, was his occupation. He was a strange man; and this strangeness, with its almost pathetic sincerity, go to make up the reason for my fondness for his poetry.

Is it not possible to see in this generous and accurate praise of Cowper some knowledge on Robinson's part of the kind of man he himself was turning out to be? As far as I know, he neither gardened nor made rabbit-hutches; but his alcoholic activities may serve as a substitute, and otherwise the description mainly fits. Rather than expressing himself in a "pathetic sincerity," as Cowper did most memorably in the lines from *The Task*, Book 3—

> I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
> Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt
> My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
> To seek a tranquil death in distant shades

—Robinson spun out parables, sad and humorous stories about losers in life's sweepstakes, and gave us what Frost in his essay referred to as a poetry of "griefs" rather than "grievances."

One of the most gratifying things about his remarkable essay is Frost's perception of the "inner humor," or (as he calls it) the "fun" of Robinson's creation. On the basis of the first two volumes, a reader might have thought him mainly interested in portraying the aspirations and yearnings of lyric souls embodied in combinations of words with strong musical effects. Yet the writer of "Richard Cory" is clearly someone who relished ironic incongruities and was more than eager to exploit the discrepancies between what "we" or society or an observer says about X, and the strange secret truth of X's inner life. With the writing of the long poem *Captain Craig* and the publication (in the 1902 volume of that title) of "The Book of Annandale" and the expertly managed "Isaac and Archibald," Robinson revealed himself as capable of ruminative, humorous verse of a leisured and assured touch. *Captain Craig* is so long that its good moments tend to get buried; but "Isaac and Archibald" is exactly the right length. A young boy goes to visit his two old friends, who separately warn him about the impending decay and senility of the other. Eventually they decide to drink some cider, and the movement down cellar is rendered in the following way:

> Down we went,
> Out of the faery sunshine to the gloom,
> Grateful and half sepulchral, where we found
> The barrels, like eight potent sentinels,
> Close ranged along the wall. From one of them
> A bright pine spile stuck out alluringly
> And on the black flat stone, just under it,
> Glimmered a late-spilled proof that Archibald
> Had spoken from unfeigned experience.

Not exactly "humor" and almost too quiet for "fun," so the term which Frost uses to end his essay must be brought into use: "The play's the thing" says Frost, playfully; and this passage from Robinson is alive with the energy of noticings, with the playful thrustings of things on the consciousness, eager to be converted into lively words.

Frost reports that he and Pound laughed over the fourth "thought" in "Miniver Cheevy" ("Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,/ And thought about it") and explains the laugh this way: "Three 'thoughts' would have been 'adequate' as the critical praise-word then was. . . . The fourth made the intolerable touch of poetry. With the

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fourth, the fun began." This observation makes it possible to look with fresh eyes at the anthology-piece and see what an ingeniously artful piece of work it is:

> Miniver mourned the ripe renown
> That made so many a name so fragrant;
> He mourned Romance, now on the town,
> And Art, a vagrant.

Any reader will have his favorite effects: mine occur in this fourth stanza as "so" is repeated while the lines swing along in their anapestic lilt; or the way it is casually, ruefully confessed that "Romance" is now, alas "on the town"; or the last line, dutifully five-syllabled as always, with its awkward-to-say "And Art," followed by a pause, then the only word that could rhyme with "fragrant."

Robinson took opportunities to insist on the importance, for due appreciation of his poetry, of the humorous faculty: "I am not suicidal, nor am I a vegetarian. I am not a pessimist or anything of the sort. My optimism and chronic appreciation of a joke, if it be a good one, are what will save me," he wrote in 1895, inviting us to note the use of "chronic" and the deadpan coupling of "suicidal" with "vegetarian." Or many years later: "Whatever merit my work may or may not possess, I fancy that it will always be a waste of time for any reader who has not a fairly well-developed sense of humor—which, as someone has said before, is a very serious thing—to bother with it." Referring to Hardy's poetry he opines that it "fares about as badly with a single reading as that of another spreader of sunshine whom I might drag in," by which the image of Hardy and Robinson as co-spreaders of gloom is nicely created. When some of his early poems were to be used in Braithwaite's anthology, Robinson noted that "my uncomfortable abstraction called 'Luke Havergal' is also to be soused in anthological pickle—along with two or three others of the forlornly joyous breed."

Anecdotes about him similarly reveal an excellently wry sense of things. At one point he wrote a letter composing his own epitaph, imagining that fifty years after he died a "small paragraph somewhere" would begin like this: "He expected to die young and should have done so. Owing, however, to some slight cosmic error, he was allowed to live beyond the logical time and to write divers books of verse, mostly about corpses and things, and lost illusions. . . ." Later the epitaph allows that "He was unpopular during his life, on account of his incurable optimism. . . ." He signed the letter "Torquato Tasso." One of the few things he seems to have done while working at the Customs Office was to write (to the same correspondent): "Madam: in reply to your letter of the second instant I have to say that bananas and skeletons may be imported free of duty. I regret to inform you that there is a duty of ten (10) per centum on baked ant's eggs. Respectfully, E. A. Robinson." From a series of anecdotes in Smith's biography I quote just one, an incident at the MacDowell Colony in which a depressed young poet, having threatened suicide, was discovered face down in the grass in the center of the circular drive, alive but prostrate and silent, determined evidently to be run over. Surrounded by the concerned occupants of the colony, their advice and wisdom had yielded no response. Finally Robinson joined them "and for a long time he considered the unhappy form. At last he spoke—'The ants will get him.'"

These examples all seem to me more or less distinguished for their wit and are dependent on a way with words, on feats of association, disproportion, grotesque and silly yokings together. Their creative life and impulse—their "play"—is the same as the kind we see in "Miniver Cheevy" where the balancing act is performed so adroitly. It will not do to call the poem "light verse" in order to place it in a safe category. It is no more light, and no less serious, than "Luke Havergal"; yet neither poem can be defended long on the grounds that it makes significant statements about life, nor bodies forth the interesting thoughts and feelings of a complex man with an expressive inner soul. This brings me to a judgment I hope is shared by others—that though these poems are verbal tours de force of impressive proportions, neither of them seems quite as serious or central or "relevant" as we ask major poems to be.

The volume on which Robinson's achievement can be judged to have deepened and extended itself is *The Man Against the Sky* (1916). After it he published very few short poems ("they just ceased to come") and few readers today are tempted to make an argu-

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ment that the long poems—whether Arthurian or domestic-psychological—form a solid basis for appreciation. Occasional purple patches, fine lines here and there, but on the whole prolix, fussy, and somehow terribly misguided—the long poems are stone-dead. Winters has a lovely paragraph on Robinson as a "belated and somewhat attenuated example" of a certain sort of New Englander (Winters is viewing this from the Pacific hills) "in which ingenuity has become a form of eccentricity; when you encounter a gentleman of this breed, you cannot avoid feeling that he may at any moment sit down on the rug and begin inventing a watch or a conundrum." This characterization fits the humorous Robinson, but also the contriver of long poems, ingeniously spun out of whole cloth and really about nothing in particular.

There is a habit of comparing Robinson with Henry James, and indeed (remembering H. G. Wells's description from *Boon*, as well as other descriptions) it is superficially plausible if one considers late James generally, say the stories in *The Finer Grain*. But there is an important difference: much energy appears to have gone into the techniques of cultivated attenuation and reader-subversion James was intent on practicing. His narrative renditions of appearances and places are done with sweep and boldness, and there is much comedy in the dialogues among characters, for all their murkiness. Robinson's overall "flat" tone, the monotonous narrative presence at the center of his tales, keeps the cap on everything, allowing no voice to break free of it even momentarily; thus the poems drag their slow lengths along and feel extremely wearied.

In arguing that Robinson's reputation as a significant modern poet depends mainly on a group of lyrics and lyrical narratives from *The Man Against the Sky*, rather than on the later longer narratives, I should also add that the title poem of the 1916 volume appears to me virtually unreadable, not "one of the most fitly eloquent of modern poems," as it has been called. Flatulence seems instead the quality characterizing the endless maundering which the problem we are supposed to care about (Where was the Man Against the Sky going? What does it all mean anyhow?) is subjected to:

> Shall we, because Eternity records
> Too vast an answer for the time-born words
> We spell, whereof so many are dead that once
> In our capricious lexicons
> Were so alive and final, hear no more
> The Word itself, the living word no man
> Has ever spelt. . . .
>
> If after all that we have lived and thought,
> All comes to Nought,—
> If there be nothing after Now,
> And we be nothing anyhow,
> And we know that,—why live?

One feels that Groucho Marx is the only appropriate person to respond to these questions. At any rate such "eloquence" should have had its neck wrung, the way Robinson was wringing it in shorter poems written at the same time.

My own list of the poems for which Robinson will be most remembered and the nature of which needs to be defined more clearly in order to locate his peculiar kind of genius includes "For a Dead Lady," from *The Town Down the River;* and the following ones from *The Man Against the Sky:* "The Gift of God," "Eros Turannos," "The Unforgiven," "Veteran Sirens," "The Poor Relation," and "Hillcrest." After 1916 only one poem, "The Sheaves," seems clearly in their class. This is roughly Yvor Winters's list of "great" poems, with "The Gift of God" added (which I am certain should be there) and "The Unforgiven" (about which I have more doubts). But Winters was unable or did not attempt to give a satisfactory account of why they were to be taken as great poems; he tells us that in general the writing is "distinguished" and that the moral vision (particularly in "Hillcrest," with its criticism of romantic escape into nature) is disenchanted and gravely sane. On the basis of these poems and a few other selected ones, Winters found Robinson to be a much finer poet than Frost, insisting that although they bore a superficial resemblance—mostly on the grounds of their shared interest in colloquial speech and New England material—any comparison in terms of "greatness" was pointless, since Frost was so clearly minor and Robinson so clearly not.

The judgment might not be worth dwelling on, had it not been made again by two extremely intelligent critics of Robinson's work. Warner Berthoff, for example, finds

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Robinson's command of tone more consistently "major" than Frost's; while Irving Howe finds his dramatic poems superior to Frost's in their fullness of experience, tragic awareness, command of the "middle range" of life. These critics emphasize and share a sense of Robinson's "weight," as opposed to surface brilliances or the sudden felicities of which Frost is master; Robinson's preeminence is signaled by his larger and deeper authority.

I myself find Frost both more interesting and "weightier" than Robinson, but am less concerned with arguing that case than with suggesting that three of Robinson's very best poems—"For a Dead Lady," "Eros Turannos," and "The Gift of God"—are remarkable for something other than weight or fullness of experience or complexity of moral feeling. In each of them I am struck by the simplicity of their "content" or subject, by contrast with the charming elaborations of their form, the attractiveness they show as tuneful fables about all-too-human situations. With each poem one wonders, just briefly, whether there wasn't a trick in it somewhere, whether the narrating presence is really as calm, as wise, as understanding of life as it appears to be over the compass of the poem.

"For a Dead Lady" presents in its first stanza the special Robinson gambit that words, language, are inadequate to express the soul, the essence of a person—are inadequate to take the measure of any human being:

> No more shall quiver down the days
> The flowing wonder of her ways,
> Whereof no language may requite
> The shifting and the many-shaded.

Yet it must be said that the poet isn't interested in trying to express much about what this lady (supposedly "based" on his mother, Mary Robinson) was like. He tells us only that nobody else's eyes will "fringe with night/ Their woman-hidden world" the way hers did; that her laugh is now silent; that her forehead and (a curious detail) her "little ears" have gone away; and that her breast has ceased to rise and fall. But the way in which the above-quoted lines work as poetry is for themselves to act as a flowing wonder of words, artfully creating the dead lady's specialness by employing striking phrases which somehow seem just right, precisely the way to describe "it," but which also can't be expatiated on and which don't abide our questions about what exactly they mean. Just *how* were her "ways" a "flowing wonder"? Or how did this wonder "quiver," or what were the shifting, many-shaded tones she manifested? One does not pursue these questions but they might need to be answered if we were to praise Robinson as a poet of moral depth and complexity of human presentation. Instead he gives us the splendid third stanza:

> The beauty, shattered by the laws
> That have creation in their keeping,
> No longer trembles at applause,
> Or over children that are sleeping;
> And we who delve in beauty's lore
> Know all that we have known before
> Of what inexorable cause
> Makes Time so vicious in his reaping.

It is extremely satisfying to participate in a confession of our common ignorance when confronted by death the reaper. The perfect positioning of "shattered," "inexorable," and "vicious," the nice shift in the sense of ways in which the lady no longer "trembles," the weary certainty in the repetition of "Know all that we have known before"—above all, the seeming inevitability of the rhymes, the strength and simplicity of the rhythm—it is these essentially verbal, rather than moral or psychological, effects which make us respond with grave assent.

The single most acute statement ever made about Robinson's lyrics was Conrad Aiken's in his 1921 review of *Avon's Harvest* where he identified the central characteristic of Robinson's verbal technique. Speaking of the poetry up through 1910, Aiken noted its "technical neatness" and also confessed to suspecting it of speciousness: ". . . what we suspect is that a poet of immense technical dexterity, dexterity of a dry, laconic kind, is altering and directing his theme, even inviting it, to suit his convictions in regard to style." Aiken is tempted to call it "padding" but decides against so harsh a word. At any rate it "took shape at the outset as the employment when rhyme-pattern or stanza dictated, of the 'vague phrase,' the phrase which gave, to the idea conveyed, an odd and somewhat pleasing abstractness." Thus Rob-

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inson's fondness for using Latinate words to achieve a "larger and looser comprehensiveness."

Aiken goes on to say that in the early volumes this comprehensiveness was "often more apparent than real," that an "engaging magician" was performing his illusions for us. But with the *Man Against the Sky* volume the "vague phrase" is "no longer specious but genuinely suggestive, and accurately indicative of a background left dim not because the author is only dimly aware of it, but because dimness serves to make it seem the more gigantic."

Although I would not draw the line so clearly between the pre-1910 poems, where the "vague phrase" is speciously employed, and the immediately post-1910 ones in which it is "genuinely suggestive," Aiken's perception is brilliantly right for purposes of getting at the life of Robinson's best lyrics. Consider the last stanza-and-a-half of "The Gift of God," a poem about a mother's unshakable belief in her son's high destiny, even though "others"—"we," "the town"—know he's a good deal more ordinary than she can see. Those others would "writhe and hesitate" if asked their opinion of him:

> While she, arranging for his days
> What centuries could not fulfill,
> Transmutes him with her faith and praise,
> And has him shining where she will.

Surely the magic in that word "transmutes" has something to do with its un-ordinary weight; a baser metal has been turned into shining gold through the uses of imagination, mother's and poet's:

> She crowns him with her gratefulness
> And says again that life is good;
> And should the gift of God be less
> In him than in her motherhood,
> His fame, though vague, will not be small,
> As upward through her dream he fares,
> Half clouded with a crimson fall
> Of roses thrown on marble stairs.

"Both nuns and mothers worship images"—Yeats's phrase from "Among School Children" comes to mind. Robinson's way of making the son's fame both vague and large at once is to use for his main verb the rather indeterminate "fares," then to produce the stunning and also mysterious "crimson fall" of those roses and those marble stairs. Here one can say, in Aiken's phrase, that language is being used in genuinely suggestive ways, as long as one doesn't have to specify closely exactly what those ways are.

There is finally the widely anthologized "Eros Turannos," a poem taken seriously in a way that even admiring readers of Robinson don't quite take "Luke Havergal" or "Miniver Cheevy." The presumption is that it exhibits psychological, even sociological penetration; and it is a poem for those who see Robinson as having a deep and sensitive understanding of the human heart. Winters called it one of the great short poems in the language, claiming for it "the substance of a short novel or of a tragic drama" and calling the writing (except for the fifth stanza, in which a "we" speaks for the town which is witness to the drama) beyond praise. The two middle stanzas describe the "securing" of the traitorous man by the self-deceiving woman in love with him:

> A sense of ocean and old trees
> Envelops and allures him;
> Tradition, touching all he sees,
> Beguiles and reassures him;
> And all her doubts of what he says
> Are dimmed with what she knows of days—
> Till even prejudice delays
> And fades, and she secures him.
>
> The falling leaf inaugurates
> The reign of her confusion;
> The pounding wave reverberates
> The dirge of her illusion;
> And home, where passion lived and died,
> Becomes a place where she can hide,
> While all the town and harbor side
> Vibrate with her seclusion.

Such handsome language for this "tragic drama," disposing itself in such a rhythmically regular way (the heavy rhymes, the audacity of rhyming "inaugurate" with "reverberate"!), the deft and rare metrical substitution of that final "vibrate"—may serve to conceal rather than more fully express the "human content" presumed to lie behind it. Here and at other moments in the poem, paraphrase feels hardly competent to translate the richness into a correspondingly subtle kind of sense.

As with other Robinson poems there is the

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feeling that everything has already happened, some place a long way back, somewhere in myth or pre-history where one struggles with the god and accepts the god's triumph:

> Though like waves breaking it may be,
> Or like a changed familiar tree,
> Or like a stairway to the sea
> Where down the blind are driven.

Robinson is the least "dramatic" of modern poets, if drama means a development in consciousness, a sense that the poem is entertaining choices even as it proceeds to its outcome. Instead the aim of "Eros Turannos" is to make the unknown background seem dim, gigantic, intensely suggestive, an object for us to wonder at, rather than penetrate or understand. It is all as inevitable and unchangeable as the hapless woman's fate in "The Poor Relation":

> With no illusion to assuage
> The lonely changelessness of dying.—
> Unsought, unthought-of, and unheard,
> She sits and watches like a bird,
> Safe in a comfortable cage
> From which there will be no more flying.

Robinson's individuality is not in question, but its nature has not yet been fully defined, nor has it been in these pages. But James Dickey's introduction to the Macmillan *Selected Poems* (1965) comes so close to getting it right that it is worthwhile trying to say how he nonetheless gets it a bit wrong. His concluding account of Robinson's "new approach," which Dickey sees as one of modern poetry's most remarkable accomplishments, consists of "making of a refusal to pronounce definitively on his subjects a virtue that allows an unparalleled fullness to his presentations, as well as endowing them with some of the mysteriousness, futility, and proneness to multiple interpretation that incidents and lives possess in the actual world." What this account leaves out, and thereby in so doing misstates Robinson's specialness, is the willfulness and the cadence of the poems.

From Dickey's account one might intuit a thoughtful, cautiously skeptical contemplator of experience, intent on not bending it to suit his own temperamental inclinations. The poems which issued from such an imagination would, on that account, feel more truly open, more (to use the unlovely Leavisian phrase) "exploratory-creative" than I take Robinson's to be—either at their most typical or at their best. At the risk of overstating the case in the other direction, I should call the "speculation upon possibilities," which Dickey finds central to the poems, less a real than an apparent phenomenon. Robinson's reticence, his solipsism even, are real enough gestures of uncertainty, of how-can-we-say-for-sure-since-we-all-know-so-little; yet the poems' rhythms show no such uncertainty, no haltingness of mind and impulse—quite the reverse. The music carries us along, as if by magic.

Dickey goes on to call Robinson's poetry the kind of communication that "tells the more the more it is not told." Let us place the line in its context of his wonderful late sonnet "The Sheaves," the note on which to take leave of Robinson:

> Where long the shadows of the wind had rolled,
> Green wheat was yielding to the change assigned;
> And as by some vast magic undivined
> The world was turning slowly into gold.
> Like nothing that was ever bought or sold
> It waited there, the body and the mind;
> And with a mighty meaning of a kind
> That tells the more the more it is not told.

The octet moves along so smoothly and inevitably that one almost neglects to ask, what *is* being asserted here anyway? So that Robinson can pay tribute to the "vast magic" he invites us to notice, his gestures perform a beautiful hocus-pocus, tell us what "it" is not—not economic tender, not to be divined by human words, telling us "the more" but not telling us more. The mysterious promise of the last two lines is what makes it memorable, quotable, seemingly full of rich insight, if only we don't question it too closely.

Where then does the poet turn?

> So in a land where all days are not fair,
> Fair days went on till on another day
> A thousand golden sheaves were lying there,
> Shining and still, but not for long to stay—
> As if a thousand girls with golden hair
> Might rise from where they slept and go away.

The extraordinary thing about these lines—the sestet of the poem—is how really unpre-

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dictable they are; one could not possibly have imagined *this* as the outcome of the poem, any more than one could have predicted the dash after "stay," then the final two lines thrown off "as if" they came by magic, by a sudden inspiration, on a charming whim. Frost alludes, in his introduction to *King Jasper*, to what he calls "the dazzle of all those golden girls" in "The Sheaves," and his language provides the right word for what the sonnet does. It dazzles by the purity of its concern, the pure poeticality of it, as if Robinson had no other motive in writing it than to write a poem. And although I wouldn't deny that "The Sheaves" is a very special poem even for Robinson to have written, it shares that purity with his poetry generally: telling the more the more it is not told, folding in upon itself rather than gazing out with love or insight or moral reproof on an "actual world." That "infolding" has been seen as a tragedy, an indication of the poet's warped nature or insufficient growth as a human being; it may have been that, but it was certainly the condition for his very considerable, very strange achievement in poetry.

The idea

of interchangeable parts,
the assumption

of a blueprint is that nothing
has to fit, a little tolerance
goes a long way. Light years

away, even Mars
moves, in a fraction
of a second the image
blurs. After years
of industrial ingenuity
the first clear pictures
came from a man who

hands full learned
to hold the image
in place by panning
the telescope
with his knee

(*for Chip*)

JAMES BAKER HALL

JAMES BAKER HALL is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Kentucky. His work has appeared in the *Hudson Review*, the *Antioch Review*, and other journals.

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In Search of the Grampian Hills with W. C. Fields

MOODY E. PRIOR

Toward the end of *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*, W. C. Fields, as Larsen E. Whipsnade, attends a reception for his daughter in the mansion of the Bel-Goodies, where he turns on his charm and succeeds in ruining his daughter's prospective marriage to wealthy young Bel-Goodie, and in consequence his own last hope of saving the insolvent circus of which he is the proprietor and chief con artist. Turned out by his hosts, Fields picks up his top hat and cape with injured dignity, and as he makes his exit he calls out to his son and daughter, "On to the Grampian Hills, children." They flee from failure and rebuff in a Roman chariot that Fields has appropriated from the circus, with the sheriff in hot but futile pursuit. "Where are those Grampian Hills, Dad?" his daughter asks as the chariot careens along a country road. "I wonder, I wonder," says Fields.

No one in the audience would be likely to wonder, and if by remote chance someone in the darkened theater was startled by what sounded like a literary echo, he would have dismissed the thought. The Grampian Hills, along with Whipsnade and Bel-Goodie, had to be just another of Fields's characteristic odd, freakish, and amusing names. After all, popular comedians, especially the products of the old vaudeville circuit, are not supposed to play around with allusions that baffle and are not recognized by their audiences. But the very next film, *My Little Chickadee*, raises a suspicion that this particular name was in a category by itself, for it pops up again at the conclusion. In this film, Mae West outsmarts and exploits Fields, but she saves him from a wild West hanging for cheating at cards, and before leaving town he bids her a courtly farewell: "If you get up around the Grampian Hills, come up and see me sometime." An engaging line, for it combines a phrase made familiar by Mae West and inevitably associated with her, and Fields's own very private allusion.

Fields seems to have had the Grampian Hills on his mind when these films were being made, as we learn from a conversation which Edgar Bergen had with Carlotta Monti, reported in her book *W. C. Fields and Me:* "When we were making 'You Can't Cheat an Honest Man,' " Bergen recalled, "we were going somewhere on location, and he said, 'If we get separated, let us all meet at the Grampian Hills.' " Fields claimed that the amusing names he used, although they sounded as if he had made them up, were always names he had come upon somewhere. The Grampian Hills can be found on a map, which is where Edgar Bergen finally discovered them. "I wondered about the name," he explained to Miss Monti, "and years later, while traveling in England, I chanced to scan a map of Scotland, and there, between the Lowlands and the Highlands, were the Grampian Hills." Fields had been to England a number of times in the days of his international travel as a successful juggler, and it would be surprising if some of the odd place-names in the British Isles had failed to appeal to him. What is puzzling about Bergen's explanation is that although Fields's mention of the Grampian Hills on location impressed him enough to

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have stayed in his mind for years, he seemed unaware of the reference to them at the end of the film he had made with Fields. And somehow the geography of Scotland does not quite account for the effect of the final dialogue, especially "I wonder, I wonder."

Only Fields could have revealed the circumstances that brought the name to his attention and gave it its personal meaning, and he seems not to have done so. "The archives of his mind," Bergen told Miss Monti, "are loaded with trivia that amuse him and confound others." The most likely source for the name is literary, and although the tracks are faint, they lead ultimately, if improbably, to an obscure eighteenth-century play, *Douglas*, by John Home. The play was once greatly admired—Walter Scott referred to it as "Home's celebrated tragedy"—and it earned for its author the dubious compliment of being regarded as the Scottish Shakespeare. It had its first performance in Edinburgh in 1756, but its big successes were in London, where the two principal roles were played by the leading actors of the day, including Sarah Siddons and William Macready. In America there are records of performances as early as 1759 and as late as 1853. Even after the play had faded from the stage during the last half of the nineteenth century, its fame survived through one speech, like some outdated opera known only through occasional performances and recordings of one aria. The speech occurs after Lord Randolph brings to his castle a Stranger, apparently of lowly birth, who had just saved Lord Randolph's life by fearlessly attacking four armed assassins. In bearing and conduct the Stranger seems above his station, and Lord and Lady Randolph, admiring him as one "ordained / And stamped a hero by the sovereign hand/ Of Nature," prevail upon him to declare who he is. The Stranger begins:

> My name is Norval: on the Grampian Hills
> My father feeds his flocks, a frugal swain
> Whose constant cares were to increase his store,
> And keep his only son, myself, at home.
> For I had heard of battles, and I longed
> To follow to the field some warlike lord.

And for some thirty lines he recounts how he led an expedition with a few friends against "a band of barbarians" who had made away with their flocks and herds, and how he slew their leader, whose arms and armor he took, and left home to join the king's warriors against the invading Dane. It must follow, of course, that Norval is no ordinary shepherd but the son of the famed Douglas who was killed in battle before "Norval" was born, and that his mother is none other than Lady Randolph. How happily all this might have ended, but for the machinations of the villainous Glenalvon!

It is difficult today to discern beyond the stilted rhetoric and worn sentiments of Norval's speech the qualities that once made it much admired. It acquired a life of its own, independent of the play, and became widely known through public recitations, lessons in speech, school memorizations, and the like (a friend remembers his mother reciting the speech when he was a boy). Books on elocution included it as a set piece. An early instance, published in London in 1774, was William Enfield's *The Speaker; or, Miscellaneous Pieces Selected from the Best English Writers . . . With a View to Facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking. To Which Is Prefixed an Essay on Elocution.* This book was often reprinted, the last edition in 1858. Norval's speech also appears as an exercise in one of the most widely used and frequently reprinted texts in the United States during the nineteenth century, C. P. Bronson's *Elocution; or, Mental and Vocal Philosophy.* The first edition of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* (1855) included the opening lines, which have appeared in every subsequent edition. Besides their usefulness as training for the young, recitations had a place in family entertainment. Jane Austen, in *Mansfield Park* (1814), provides a glimpse of how it was. Tom and Edmund Bertram are arguing over whether their absent father would approve of their putting on a contemporary play, and Tom defends the project by reminding Edmund how often they declaimed for the elder Bertram:

> Nobody is fonder of exercise of talent in young people, or promotes it more than my father, and for anything of the acting, spouting, reciting kind, I think he has always a decided taste. I am sure he encouraged it in us as boys. How many a time have

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we mourned over the dead body of Julius Caesar, and *to be'd* and *not to be'd*, in this very room, for his amusement? And I am sure, *my name was Norval*, every day of my life through one Christmas holidays.

There among the perennial Shakespearian favorites is Norval's speech.

How familiar it had become we can guess from casual allusions and quotations. In *Dombey and Son*, for instance, Dickens says of Captain Cuttle's frugal way with words, "he had better, like young Norval's father, 'increase his store.'" It is not a very illuminating analogy, but for that very reason it attests to the currency of Norval's speech, since it does little more than flatter the reader who catches on as one who shares with the author a common cultural experience. One of the liveliest allusions occurs in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, when the irrepressible Clandon twins are being introduced to the family solicitor:

> Philip. I was christened in a comparatively prosaic mood. My name is—
>
> Dolly [completing his sentence for him declamatorily]. "Norval. On the Grampian Hills—"
>
> Philip [declaiming gravely]. "My father feeds his flocks a frugal swain—"

in 1897, when this play appeared, a performance of *Douglas* was very unlikely, but Shaw apparently assumed that an appreciable number of his audience would be familiar with Norval's speech, for the full effect of the twins' performance depends on the pleasure of recognition. However, the mocking way in which the twins play with the lines implies that the days when they could be taken seriously were already numbered.

Shaw's stage directions confirm the status of Norval's speech as a recitation piece, but the finest illustration of the flavor and resonance that it once had is preserved in Lionel Barrymore's description—as reported in *Good Night, Sweet Prince*, Gene Fowler's biography of John Barrymore—of his actor-father giving Norval's speech the full treatment:

> It was during our childhood that we first heard from Papa himself concerning the Grampian Hills. Papa used to stride up and down the room in his zebra undershirt, his eyes bright, his long forefinger leveled at some fabulous world unseen by mere mortals, and recite:
>
> "My name is Norval; on the Grampian Hills
> My father feeds his flocks, a frugal swain . . ."

This reminiscence had come about because Fowler asked Lionel to explain the significance of an allusion to the Grampian Hills in a letter John Barrymore had written to Fowler's son in 1937:

> We have found a house [John wrote] which, if we can only get it—as the owner is in Mexico, probably being shot—will have a murderer's room with a concrete base, where you and I, and those cognoscenti of whom we approve (I need scarcely say an excessively attenuated roster!) can cavort and have our being undisturbed. It will also have a swimming pool that will wind tortuously among overhanging trees. *And* a pool table, at which we will fleece the neighboring bumpkins! Give my best love to your father and mother and the rest of the family. Soon I trust we will all be tending our flocks together on the Grampian Hills—where the cows *really* do come home.

Fowler's attempts to find in Scottish geography and Home's play a clue to the implications of the speech for John were dismissed by Lionel:

> It's news to me what it is or where it comes from. It didn't matter to us then nor would it now; we were not a family for research. Jack never knew what the Grampian Hills actually were; but he knew what they *meant*. What they meant to him. Our father's grand inflections made them appear to us what Utopia must have meant to Sir Thomas More; what the Promised Land, Arcadia, the Elysian Fields, the Garden of the Hesperides, Zion and all the rest rolled together, meant to the groping, dreaming men of all the ages. It was a place where caravans rested; where time itself stood still.

The elder Barrymore's recitations must have been stirring and powerful, but none of the heroic and warlike aspirations of Norval seem to have left an impression on the sons, only the strange place-name and its evocative pastoral associations. Detached from the play and even from its own immediate context of meanings, the speech nevertheless conveyed rich, even magical overtones.

Fields knew the Barrymores well, and in some important respects he and John were compatible. Among random notes that Fields

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had accumulated for a possible column for the Bell Syndicate there is the following item: "When the Government needed 75,000 more tanks, John Barrymore and W. C. Fields immediately offered their services." Robert Lewis Taylor, in his biography of Fields, tells about one memorable convivial occasion during the war when Gene Fowler, John and Lionel Barrymore, and Fields were moved to enlist and drove to a recruiting station, with Lionel in his wheelchair, to offer their services. ("Who sent you, the enemy?" asked the woman in charge.) In circumstances such as these, Fields may have heard John mention the Grampian Hills with feeling, for Fowler reports that "whenever Jack spoke of those hills a far-away spell would possess him." It is, of course, just as likely that during the years at the turn of the century when Fields was performing in all sorts of theaters in this country and around the world, he might have encountered an old-time actor who, like Maurice Barrymore, would tune up with "My name is Norval." The Barrymore story does not settle the question of the source of the allusions to the Grampian Hills in the two Fields films, but it does provide a significant clue to their meaning, one that points to something basic in his character and his comedy.

Fields played many roles, but they all had an essentially similar central core, and in many respects the character he created was an extension of himself. He was on the way to success even in his teens, but his boyhood was harsh and unhappy, and during his early career he was sometimes cheated by unscrupulous or desperate theatrical managers. Even in the days when he was celebrated and wealthy he never got over the uneasy feeling that he was engaged in a very precarious calling, that success was ephemeral, that banks were untrustworthy, that people were unpredictable and generally unscrupulous, and that every move required his utmost in cunning and sleight of hand. He could be affectionate, friendly, and even generous, but he was chronically suspicious and cranky. Yet he seemed aware of the absurdity of it all. He achieved his initial success as a juggler who dressed as a tramp and who would falter or miss in a routine only to make a desperate recovery that was technically brilliant and funny at the same time. This was his prototype, a metaphor for his comic art and his view of the human condition. In his films his elegant phrases, his fastidious manners, his self-conscious dignity all betray constant vigilance against the imminent possibility of defeat and humiliation, but he seems never lacking in will and resources for a comeback.

The comic character that Fields created is, accordingly, not of the ludicrous kind that is exposed to ridicule for its follies and stupidities and punished for them with laughter. It belongs rather to that more amiable group of comic figures with whom we sympathize, who are masters in the art of survival, employing their talents in a lively gamble to win at the odds, in defiance of nature and the repressions and suspicions of society. It is the kind of comedy that has produced some of the most durable and endearing comic characters of fiction and drama, and includes such familiar comic heroes as Falstaff, Sancho Panza, the Good Soldier Schweik, Groucho, and Chaplin. Even when they find it expedient to employ shady means that we are too respectable to employ, we are on their side because we admire their zest for life, and because they seem to be fighting our battle and enjoying it. Behind their ebullience and bravado there is sometimes a suggestion of gravity, for the game they play must ultimately be lost, although it is not honorable to mention it. "I would it were bed-time, Hal, and all well," says Falstaff just before the battle of Shrewsbury. The prince reminds him, "Why, thou owest God a death." But Falstaff turns aside this intrusive thought: " 'Tis not due yet, I would be loath to pay him before his day." The danger of failure is always there, whether immediate or remote, but that only sharpens their wits and seems to justify their outrageous practices and fanciful expedients. And because our sympathies are with them we do not want to see them lose—or, if they do, left without resources to try again. We want to preserve the mood of high spirits and laughter in their company without a turn to pathos at their total defeat.

In some of his films, especially the earlier ones, Fields ends up a success. A fraudulent scheme for selling dry oil wells prospers in an unexpected way when the wells bring in oil; an invention proves its worth after misadventures—the windshield is indeed shat-

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terproof, the tire punctureproof; an orange ranch that turns out to be desert is then profitably sold for a racetrack. But in *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* and *My Little Chickadee* success completely eludes him. After the usual pattern of brazen effronteries, clever evasions, and dignified yet desperate recoveries, Fields finds himself in a final situation where events are out of his control and there are no more moves left save to accept defeat and go on. But for the comic character that Fields created and the comic effect of which he was the master, there cannot be the implication of a permanent reversal. There must remain the possibility of some recovery, the expectation, at least, of coming upon new territory where the suckers will listen or his luck will turn. Of this ebullience of spirit, this refusal to despair, the Grampian Hills are a sign and a symbol. What makes the allusions to them in these two films especially intriguing is that they are hidden and deceptive. By the time the films appeared (1939 and 1940) Norval's speech had become a cultural fossil from another era, and the kind of recognition that Shaw took for granted could no longer be expected. Fields's references to the Grampian Hills thus amounted to a sly and private game, highly personal since Fields himself was largely responsible for the scripts. Only in the repetition of the allusion in *My Little Chickadee* is there a hint that something beyond the mere oddity of the name is involved—and in the fact that in both films the allusion enters in exactly the same way, as an accompaniment of Fields's departure with the strong suggestion that he is not through.

No matter how Fields came across Norval's speech, it would not have been in character for him to endow it with the romantic inflation of the Barrymores, but the wryly comic air in which he utters the name at the conclusion of the films does not exclude at least a hint of magic. In the landscape through which the chariot passes in the final scene of *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*, the Grampian Hills can stand for some undetermined place down the road where the irrepressible Fields and his companions can get a fresh start. The conclusion of *My Little Chickadee* is less buoyant and animated. The idea of having Fields and Mae West teamed up in the same film may have sounded great in theory, but although the funniest scenes are those with Fields, Mae West controls the action and Fields is often, uncharacteristically, the victim. At the end his schemes have failed, he has been humiliated, he has barely escaped with his life, and his bravado is deflated. As he stands alone amid these ruins he is as close to down and out as we ever see him. He looks a little wistful as he bids Mae West farewell, but he does not lose his aplomb, and he drops a cryptic hint that he retains in his mind's eye the image of a quirky Utopia which is not shown on any map but which, with the help of some audacity and a little luck, he does not despair of finding.

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Grandmother

JOANNA THOMPSON

She reaches inside the farmhand's
leg/pulls two bone edges
together/stitches her boiled
needle & cotton sutures/
implacable/into his ragged
skin. Tying planed wood
about the tractored leg,
she has finished for now.

To the smokehouse: she takes
a butcher blow between the
joints of the dead calf/strips
the chops/hangs the quarters
on a bloody hook: the calf
was called Sally.

They must be fed: eggs she
cracks into the big blue bowl
plunging ten fingers clean
into the mass/all things
blending
dissolving
working
toward her thumbs.

Stillness shifts from these hands
upon the colt

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upon the screaming child
even on tilled, still earth
the seed is pressed
in stillness.
A moment there of quiet
conception.

She washes them slowly
one upon the other
scrubbing.
When she drops the brush,
dries them
looks about
goes to bed
the day finishes.

JOANNA THOMPSON's poetry has appeared in the *California Quarterly, Descant,* the *New Quarterly,* and other journals.

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February 11, 1977

(To my son John)

FREDERICK MORGAN

You died nine years ago today.
I see you still sometimes in dreams
in white track-shirt and shorts, running,
against a drop of tropic green.

It seems to be a meadow, lying
open to early morning sun:
no other person is in view,
a quiet forest waits beyond.

Why do you hurry? What's the need?
Poor eager boy, why can't you see
once and for all you've lost this race
though you run for all eternity?

Your youngest brother's passed you by
at last: he's older now than you—
and all our lives have ramified
in meanings which you never knew.

And yet, your eyes still burn with joy,
your body's splendor never fades—
sometimes I seek to follow you
across the greenness, into the shade

of that great forest in whose depths
houses await and lives are lived,
where you haste in gleeful search of me
bearing a message I must have—

but I, before I change, must bide
the "days of my appointed time,"
and so I age from self to self
while you await me, always young.

● FREDERICK MORGAN's most recent books are *Poems of the Two Worlds* and *The Tarot of Cornelius Agrippa.*

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Books

A Genius for Seeing

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

DOROTHEA LANGE: A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LIFE. *By Milton Meltzer. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. $15.*

First a note about my relation to this book and its subject. For the last twenty-one years of her life, 1944–65, Dorothea Lange and I were friends, as were our immediate families. Partly because of this friendship, I wrote about photography and photographers (including her), and largely because of what I had written, she entrusted me with writing the introductory essay to the book of her photographs that derived from the exhibit of her life's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1966. As for the author of this biography, Milton Meltzer, I provided him in the course of a half-hour interview with a handful of facts and opinions about Dorothea, most of which may be found, accurately reported, in the book. In addition to these involvements, I have a purely literary one. Though as a writer I have avoided biography—all those unmalleable facts the narrator is stuck with, all those often faulty memories he must rely on, all that tact imposed upon him—I have strong views, derived from both practice and theory, on the art of story-telling, many of which views apply to biography as well as to the other important varieties of narrative. Let the reader be warned: I come to this book interested and critical, in both senses of both words.

Dorothea Lange had a genius for seeing. She became important during the thirties because she saw the poor of America, and used her camera as a way of making it possible for America at large to see its poor, better than anyone else had done—better, indeed, than anyone else has done since. A few of the images she made to document some of what was there in the social world were fine works of art, but she did not make them primarily for art's sake. Neither did she make them primarily to effect social change, though she was willing and even eager to have them used for bettering the conditions of the poor, the down and out, the oppressed, the "walking wounded." The core of her impulse was to see and show *what is there* in those parts of the world to which she was most strongly drawn. Time has transmuted "that's the way it is" into "that's the way it was," and many of those once-potent images are now only better-than-usual snapshots, good for nostalgia's sake. Several, however, have survived undiminished, firmly established in their own right; along with some others she made in the last two decades of her life, they make her an important figure in the history of photography; one of them, *Migrant Mother*, is not only hers but also leads an anonymous life apart from her, having been appropriated as an icon of folk art in more than one country, most recently, after suitable retouching, by the Black Panthers.

But though Dorothea Lange's genius for seeing with a camera is what makes her important in the world and also intensifies the reader's interest in her, it is not that genius in itself which makes her a good subject for a biography. For that purpose, it matters much more that she talks well about herself and her work. Unlike many artists, she does not cover her traces as a creator. Reading this book, one does not just contemplate the end result of her striving to make images that, to her mind,

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are beautiful only if they are true; one can follow her as she strives, because in the book she talks intelligently about this process, in letters and notebooks, through the memories of friends and disciples, from tape in an extensive oral history interview made when she was sixty-five, five years before her death.

When you look at Dorothea Lange's enduring photographs, a few of which are reproduced in this book, you learn something about *there* and *then* but little about her; she was interested in *what is there now,* not in Expressing her Self. Similarly, when relatives and friends testify that she was an extraordinary woman, you learn much more about what they think she was than about what she was. Take my own testimony, for example. Through the chances of neighborhood, I got to know her before I knew her work. I observed and felt her effect on her brother, oldest son, husband, on her two young assistants, my friends, on my wife and me, and I knew her then and remember her still to be as powerful a woman as I have ever met—responsive, observant, capable of stabs of contemptuous cruelty and also of sentimentality, always intense yet sometimes unassertive, familial, ambitious, easy to please but hard to satisfy, restless, grateful, intelligent and humorous, liberal, fastidious, domineering at home but self-subordinating when prowling among strangers with a camera around her neck, innerly reserved, tenacious, riven by self-doubt, resolute against despair. Now what do you know? Mostly that I found her a strong, many-sided woman, as did scores upon scores of others who knew her, but her herself you have learned little about. For that, you must see her in action, must imagine what she did, must hear stories about the woman. ("Woman," not "person"—she never desexed herself, not even when old, wasted, in pain from cancer.)

To whet your appetite, I am going to cite some instances of Dorothea Lange as woman and artist that Meltzer, and she through him, provide in this book—which is much the best source of such stories now available.

Artists with a vocation as life-shaping as hers are likely to hear the call first in early adolescence.

When she was fourteen, she was looking out the window, toward the Hackensack Meadows. She saw the red brick houses, with little yards between, wooden fences separating them, and wash lines hanging everywhere against the late-afternoon sky, tracing vivid patterns and squeaking rustily in the wind. She turned to the woman standing behind her and said, "To me, that is beautiful." The woman replied, "To you, everything is beautiful."

It startled Dorothea "because I hadn't realized it. It also helped me. I thought everyone saw everything that I saw and didn't talk about it. But when this person said 'To you everything's beautiful,' that made me aware that maybe I had eyesight."

She did not just hear the call: she had the resolution and steadfastness to answer it despite the world.

"I have known all my life so many people, my contemporaries, who have been 'regulars' and always done what they should do, have gone down the regular roads, followed the channels, been proper, made the grades—and lost."

When she graduated from high school and her worried mother asked her *now what?,* she knew the answer for sure: "I want to be a photographer."

Her kind of photography required her to move among others, whether strangers or intimates, without making them self-conscious, to be all there within herself without imposing that forceful self upon her subjects—a talent attested to by all who saw her at work, a talent she acquired even before she began photographing.

"I know how to keep an expression of face that would draw no attention, so no one would look at me. I have used that my whole life in photographing. I can turn it on and off. If I don't want somebody to see me I can make the kind of face so eyes go off me . . . a self-protective thing. . . . I learned that as a child in the Bowery."

But she did not use this talent just as a tool; she cultivated it, played with it, developed it, made it part of herself.

"In fact, a very good way to work is to open yourself as wide as you can, which in itself is a difficult thing to do—just to be like a piece of unexposed, sensitized material. . . . You force yourself to watch and wait. You accept all the discomfort and disharmony."

At seven Dorothea had polio, as a result of which she limped for the rest of her life. At least two people who worked with her profes-

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AMIRI BARAKA/ LEROI JONES:

the quest for a "populist modernism"

WERNER SOLLORS

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sionally never noticed the limp. One longtime friend thought she limped only when tired. My own impression is well suggested by another friend whom Meltzer quotes: "The limp, though 'quite pronounced, went with her, like her beret and her silver brooch.' " In the long interview which she taped at the age of sixty-five, she said of being a semicripple:

"I think it was perhaps the most important thing that happened to me. It formed me, guided me, instructed me, helped me, and humiliated me. . . . Years afterwards, when I was working as I work now, with people who were strangers to me, being disabled gave me an immense advantage. People are kinder to you. It puts you on a different level than if you go into a situation whole and secure. . . . My acceptance, finally, of my lameness truly opened gates for me."

But at the age of sixty-two, in the last session of a photography class she had been conducting,

Dorothea put up some of her own photographs. One of them was of her right foot, held in the air, naked, damaged, unattractive. "I hate that foot!" she said. Startled, one photographer asked why. "Because I got polio as a child," she replied, "and that's the result of it." "But how can you say you hate it? It's part of your own body." "I hate it," she said.

So far from being bothered by inconsistency, that hobgoblin of little minds, she was indifferent to it or amused by it—another evidence of her largeness of spirit. Take her attitudes toward photography as propaganda and as art. At one time she could say:

"Everything is propaganda for what you believe in, isn't it? . . . The harder and more deeply you believe in anything, the more in a sense you're a propagandist."

Yet in the last two years of her life, an assistant in his early twenties upset her by saying "he thought the Egyptian photographs, like her work in Asia, showed more concern for pure esthetics than for the social implications of that culture." But frequently she would cite the sentence from Francis Bacon which she kept pinned to her darkroom door: "The contemplation of things as they are, without error or confusion, without substitution or imposture, is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of invention"—a good maxim for anyone but especially for one who is working in a medium in which frivolous ingenuity is as easy and profitable as it is in photography.

In *Under the Trees* and *The Closer for Me,* the two half-hour documentaries made of Dorothea Lange for educational television in the last year of her life, you may see something of her spirit—though not much of it, for she was on what was for her the less familiar side of the lens. One detail of her behavior caught by the TV camera I especially want to call to your attention as a way of imagining something of her. Three and a half months before her death, she gave me a day, wanting to prime me for the essay I was to write about her work. She gave me of herself for most of seven hours, and the self she gave was, because of the pressure she was under and despite her illness, her essential self, the Dorrie I had long known and admired and loved more than not. She talked about what—and how, and why—she had made. Now, reading this biography, I learn that after that day she wondered "if he got anything from his day with me. I had the feeling that he was unobservant, non-visual." True enough. I was incomparably more concerned with connecting with her than with looking at pictures which I had seen before and would see again; words and relationships, not images, are my way. She talked until her voice faded, clogged. A couple of times she disappeared for a few minutes without explanation, and once, caught too fast to escape, she turned from me and buried her face in her hands, as you may see her do in one of the filmed interviews, saying in a low voice in which there was more of recognition than of distress, "Oh boy, oh boy." Her destroyer was reminding her. She tried, and succeeded as well as was humanly possible, to keep her trouble to herself, not to dump it on others. Some traces she covered well.

An important artist who lets you in on her ways of working, a fascinating woman who kept her private life private and even mysterious, Dorothea Lange is obviously a fine protagonist; yet more is needed if her life story is to be first-rate. Edward Weston had such qualities of character, too, but the story of his life is less interesting than hers. A good

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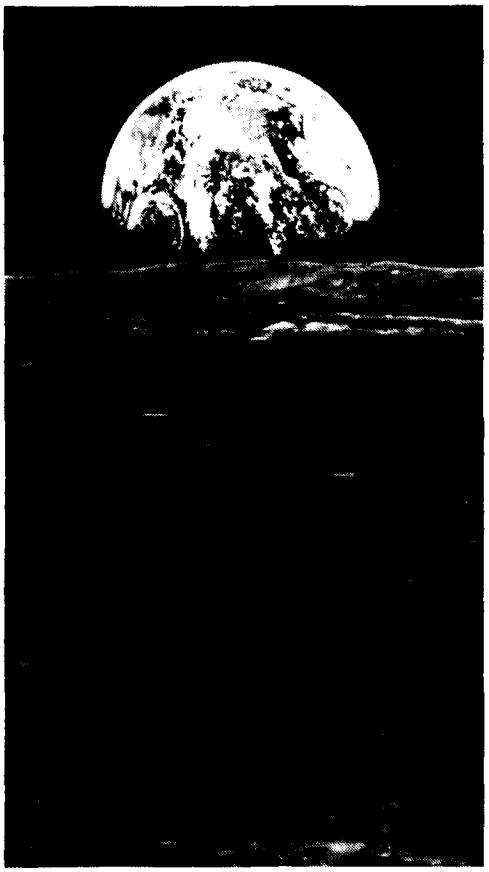

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story needs conflict between powerful and nearly equal forces, and not for a moment did any force in Weston's life contend with his dedication to Art, to himself as Artist; his life story, like a saint's life as usually rendered, is so one-sided as to appeal primarily to true believers. But in Dorothea Lange the struggle between art and family was savage, relentless. For the world at large, Lange the artist matters incomparably more than Dorothea the wife and mother, but for the reader of her life story, as for her herself, the contention was between irreconcilable forces, each a great good in itself, neither of which finally triumphed, though at any given time one would be dominant over the other. In her most productive years, she neglected her children as ruthlessly as Weston ever neglected his, for she accepted as fully as did he the century-old bohemian article of faith that dedication to Art is hostile to devotion to family; the difference between them in this respect was that for him Art was unchallengeably the greatest good whereas for her responsibility and love, for both family and society, were goods no less great. So I infer from something Rondal Partridge told me. In the mid-thirties, when he was a young beginner working with her, she told him she could make him rich and famous as a photographer but only if he would forgo having a family of his own.

Though Meltzer provides the important materials for imagining the story of Dorothea Lange, he did not exhaust all the known sources of information. The Oakland Museum collection of Lange prints and memorabilia as well as interviews and documents relating to her and her work were available to him, but he makes meager use of this, the richest archival source of information about her work as photographer. The book *Dorothea Lange* by Theresa Thau Heyman, issued by the Oakland Museum in the month in which Meltzer's biography came out, July 1978, contains a listing of the museum's Lange collection as well as some commentary, photographs from the museum's 1978 Lange show (many of these photographs, especially those from her earlier, portraiture days, have never been displayed before), and perceptive critical essays by Heyman, who is the museum's curator of photography. Since Meltzer and Heyman did not consult ahead of time, the books overlap, though less than one might expect; they complement each other well, Heyman's primarily for commentary on the work, Meltzer's primarily for the life. Even so, though new materials may turn up either from the museum's archives or from other sources, it seems unlikely that they will be of much importance to an understanding of the woman herself.

Meltzer has done his legwork, following leads no one else followed; he has not distorted story or character in any significant way that I am aware of; he has an overview which orders the facts coherently; nevertheless, the story he tells, while good, is not quite right. There are, I believe, two reasons for this: haste and psychologizing.

Haste is evident in many small errors which polishing and double-checking would have eliminated. With two words, the index could have made clear a fact the text muddles: that Christina Gardner, a much-quoted and rich source of information and opinion, was formerly the wife of Homer Page and originally was a member of the Clausen family (which name Meltzer misspells Closen throughout). He puts Sather Gate on the Columbia campus instead of the Berkeley campus where it belongs. Many more ill-identified or even unidentified names of people appear than narrative clarity and ease of understanding permit. The prose sometimes descends from standard English to the irrelevantly colloquial, for instance in the frequent use of incomplete sentences. There are some needless repetitions. There are minor errors of fact, two of which may stand for the many. In the book's last paragraph, Meltzer says that after the cremation "her family took the urn down to the beach and dropped the ashes into the water. But they would not sink. The flakes floated away." But according to Paul Taylor, her widower, devoted to her for the thirty years of their marriage and to her memory still, the ashes were in a small wooden box into which he had drilled holes so it would sink; it was the box, not the ashes, they watched floating quite a while before it disappeared beneath the surface of the sea. And in the third paragraph of the book, Meltzer says:

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> Dorothea Lange was born Dorothea Margaretta Nutzhorn on May 25, 1895. . . . Like many who are unhappy with their surname [*sic*], she dropped Nutzhorn (and her middle name) in favor of her mother's maiden name, Lange. Not just because Nutzhorn sounded harsh or comic in some ears. It seems to have been a name she wanted desperately to forget. Only after her death did her husband and children discover what her true name was, and then by chance.

But, again according to Paul Taylor, it was not at all by chance that this astonishing fact was made known to the family. Hope Stoddard's *Famous American Women* (a book published in 1970 but not included in Meltzer's bibliography) states in the entry for Dorothea Lange that her father's name was Henry Nutzhorn. Preparing the book, Miss Stoddard had asked Paul Taylor about Dorothea's father; Taylor went to the only survivor he knew from her girlhood, the woman with whom Dorothea Nutzhorn had left Hoboken at the age of twenty-two to arrive in San Francisco the Dorothea Lange she remained for the rest of her life. Because she kept that huge secret all her life, this inaccuracy in the biography matters, as does every other detail related to the change of name by her and her brother. (Their mother's resumption of her maiden name, when granted a divorce on the ground of desertion, was perhaps independent of the children's changing their names, though the biography leaves this unclear.) Still, the inaccuracy about how the family learned of Dorothea's original name does not matter very much, and one by one the other inaccuracies in the book matter even less. But, accumulated, these and the other evidences of haste do matter, enough to prevent the book, thorough and interesting though it is, from being as good as it could have been.

The other unfortunate element in the book is its chronic psychologizing. A typical example appears in the above quotation: "It seems to have been a name she wanted desperately to forget." Such a sentence is not just superfluous, it interferes; in any kind of narrative, to spell out the obvious in motivation is to do some of the reader's imaginative activity for him, and so deprive him of just that much of his vital enjoyment. In occasional small doses, overexplanation does little harm; but as a steady thing it not only vitiates the experience of reading a story, it tells you what to think, limiting and stultifying that play of speculation which is one of the high goods of narrative.

> Once she told a five-year-old grandson that a granddaughter he especially favored wouldn't be able to come to his birthday party—and then presented the little girl to him in a large gift-wrapped box. Was the time and care she gave them an attempt to make up for the bad years with her children and Paul's? If she had not fallen sick in 1945—a half dozen years before the first of the many grandchildren was born—and been forced to stay close to home, would she have been different?

Uncluttered by these two heavy-handed questions, the cruelty latent in making that child wait in disappointment for the big surprise would have been more evident to the reader. Psychologizing is, of course, customary in daily life among educated Americans, and Meltzer frequently quotes others' interpretations of Dorothea, as in the following passage, along with his own:

> Although her powerful will made her magnificent, it could make her destructive too. Her insistence upon shaping people to her pattern was attributed by some to her polio; it was her way of compensating for a physical handicap. Dorothea herself, however, often told stories of how "Teutonic," how demanding her grandmother was. It did not seem to occur to her that this was one of her own characteristics.

The compensation theory in the second of these sentences is a dubious psychological cliché attributed by Meltzer to some of her acquaintances, but in the last sentence the intrusive conjecture about what she knew is Meltzer's own—and pure nonsense. She knew perfectly well that domination was a characteristic of hers. She once said to me, "Watch me make Dan jump," then shouted upstairs to her adult son in a drill sergeant's voice and laughed maliciously when he came running scared. To understand something about yourself is not necessarily to talk about it, to overexplain. Indeed, in those shaded, ambiguous areas of the self to which story is drawn by its very nature, especially when the protagonist is as subtle as Dorothea Lange, interpreting an anecdote limits its imaginative truth.

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But, though psychologizing makes the book gummy, especially toward the end, it does not prevent the essential story. And happily, Meltzer, who clearly is not knowledgeable about photography, does not intrude in respect of her work but by and large lets her and her colleagues and students speak about it in nonpsychological language. The core of this crucial theme, her photography, is to be found in the opening paragraphs of chapter 18. For example, one student in the first seminar she taught recalls:

> She paused often, aware of what a pause can mean. Every statement seemed a commitment. "The good photograph," she kept repeating, "is not the object. The consequences of that photograph are the object. And I'm not speaking of social consequences. I mean the kind of thing where people will not say to you, how did you do it, or where did you get this, but *that such things could be!*"

This is the sort of thing biography cannot have too much of.

Psychology is far better equipped, in theory, vocabulary, and popular acceptance, to talk about family relationships than about artistic creation. In this biography, Meltzer lets the materials for understanding the photographer as documenter and as artist speak for themselves, leaving the mystery intact; but, though the materials for presenting the wife and mother are also abundant and also capable of speaking for themselves, he psychologizes them, obfuscating their mystery. However, he does not overexplain or overmoralize the connection between the elements at war in her personality, so that the structure of the story emerges clearly—an imperfect and excessive narrative, yes, but also potent and coherent. Her flawed grandeur is not lost.

Career woman: homemaker. Bohemianism: respectability. The Cause: art for art's sake. My children: my work. The familiar antitheses are appropriate to Dorothea Lange; none contain her. Zealotry can stereotype anyone, of course, but it would take a zealot of formidable stupidity to stereotype this woman. She is so untidy, so slippery with inconsistencies and contradictions, so conscious, that the moment you think you have her boxed into a category there she is laughing at you behind your back.

At any given time, there is nothing pat and predictable in the relation between her work as photographer and her life as wife and mother. In the first of the three main periods of her professional career, she lived the bohemian life with the painter Maynard Dixon, her first husband and the father of her two children; but her photography during this period was strictly commercial. "I was a tradesman. At least I so regarded myself." She was the most fashionable portrait photographer in San Francisco. "I had the cream of the trade. I was the person to whom you went if you could afford it." (A dozen and a half of these portraits are to be found in the Heyman volume.) In the middle years, when she made most of her best and all of her widely known photographs, she was an employee of the United States government, burning with the impulse to expose to the powerful the plight of the downtrodden; but to perform this highly responsible task, she neglected her own children, farming them out in foster homes for months at a time. In her last period, old, relieved of financial pressure, in precarious health, her life was centered in her family; but the best pictures from this period were neither the many she made of her family nor the few she made as social documentation but some of those taken in Asia and Egypt, as far from home as she ever got.

The best, that is, with two exceptions: two of the strongest images she ever made are not of people or of human artifacts but of live-oak trees, and in these, made in the 1950s, her splendid ambiguity is manifest. Seen out of personal context in a museum or book, they are beautiful in the way Adams's or Weston's images of natural things are beautiful; indeed, it is as aesthetic objects needing no identifying labels of when or where, much less the documenting sort of caption she attached to many of her photographs, that these two will, I believe, survive for a long time. But those were not just a couple of handsome trees she chanced upon or prowled a forest to find; they were in her own backyard. Because they were of her home place, she saw them. (I now look at those actual live oaks and do not see them; what I can see is her pictures of them.) She was a true artist: some of the strength of her best work derives

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from her own personal feeling transmuted into images which to the viewer need have nothing to do with her private emotions. As Meltzer suggests, it was at the time she was neglecting her own children that she made the image by which she is universally known, that she saw, then *took the picture*, of a mother who was not attending the children leaning on her, the baby in her arms. To the world at large, this connection between artist and subject is irrelevant and always will be so, but it matters profoundly to one who is getting to know the woman by reading the story of her life.

In 1934 Willard Van Dyke wrote of her: "Her method is to eradicate from her mind before she starts, all ideas which she might hold regarding the situation—her mind like an unexposed film." And, as Meltzer extrapolates from her comments on her work in Asia late in her life: "She didn't know what she was doing until it was finished and she saw what she had done." Exactly. That is as near the heart of the matter as you can hope to get, and thank God it comes in plain English.

Yet she was not satisfied with her accomplishment. She agreed to a one-man show only when she knew she was dying. She believed that, just as her children had been shortchanged for photography's sake, her art had suffered for family's sake. But how true this is, if it is true at all, one cannot say for sure. In 1960, while on a trip to South America with Paul Taylor, she wrote in the travel notes she kept:

> I believe that I can *see*, that I have the ability to read from what I see. I believe that I can see straight and true, and fast. I do not see secondhand, and operate in preconceptions. It is not easy for me to work on Paul's expeditions. I learn much, but I am not free. Rather I do not *feel* free. The gentleman whom I love so much does his very best, his very best, consciously and conscientiously, to make everything for me as right as he can. . . . It is hard for him to learn new or changed ways. He *relies* on his fixed habits and approaches. He is slower to adjust and protects himself by his *methods*. And I am so much weaker, and quicker, and flexible. I *have* no habits, in the habit of growing up in the quiet of my own soul.

She glossed this, probably in 1965: "This is one of my characteristic bleats. Over and over. A small talent is easily defeated. I take it out, my malaise, on others." One cannot say for sure how true this is either. A small talent? What one can be sure of is that the woman herself had something of the heroic about her. She did not come apart under the strains; she did not settle for the one thing or the other; she did not give up; she refused to use pain and fear as shelters. She was and is revered by a great many friends, relatives, strangers, and their consciousness of her shortcomings and cruelty does not spoil their living admiration. It took cancer to kill her at the age of seventy, and she lived to the end. "Isn't it a miracle," she said to Paul a few hours before her death, "that this comes at the *right* time!"

Dismantling Philosophy

THE LIFE OF THE MIND. Volume I: THINKING; Volume II: WILLING. *By Hannah Arendt. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Each volume $12.50.*

Reviewed by GEORGE KATEB

One of Hannah Arendt's great powers was the ability to refresh perception. She tried to get us to look again at subjects on which there already existed perhaps too much writing and therefore too much confident understanding. By her further reflection, she tried to save these subjects for our further reflection. Her rediscovery was actually discovery. The reader experienced a shock, not of recognition, but of revelation. Certainly in her analysis of anti-Semitism, or Nazism, or the American Revolution, or Greek thought about action, or "the banality of evil" she may be said to have achieved originality, to have compelled us to open ourselves up to new thoughts, often harsh or strange. In her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, this power is fully present. The voyage of rediscovery is, if anything, more arduously undertaken than ever before; the results may be, as the book is slowly absorbed over the years, as unsettling as any she had earlier induced.

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Coming to terms with a book by Hannah Arendt should never be easy. Each is so richly unexpected that it resists one's natural tendency to see it as part of a larger tradition or tendency of thought, or to enlist it in some ideological cause. Her work just does not cooperate with the techniques we all have for arranging the contents of our mental universe. *The Life of the Mind* offers this kind of resistance to a degree that is unusual even for her. In responding to the book, however, one must know that not only did she always write to shake us out of settled habits, but also that when she died in December 1975 her last book "was not in final shape," as Mary McCarthy, the book's editor, tells us in a remarkable "Postface." It seems to me that the book is sometimes digressive, or uneven in its proportions, or lacking in explicit connections and emphases. Even more important, Arendt did not live to finish the work, to write the third part, "Judging." So we must be somewhat tentative in what we say. Yet I think the book is extraordinary; I don't feel the need to be tentative in saying that.

At the start of the first volume, *Thinking*, Arendt says she is leaving "the relatively safe fields of political science and theory" to take up questions that are more strictly philosophical. After all, to try to disclose the nature of thinking and willing is to be engaged in a kind of epistemological inquiry rather remote from political philosophy and reminiscent, say, of William James's *Principles of Psychology*. She does mention that one of the sources of her concern was her realization that a person like Adolf Eichmann could help to administer a system of atrocity without feeling any hatred, or indeed any passion, toward those he put to death. Eichmann could do what he did because he was incapable of thinking: that was Arendt's hunch. The hunch played a part in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and was worked out in a preliminary way in an essay published almost ten years later, "Thinking and Moral Considerations." So Arendt's theoretical absorption with politics is not suppressed. But I think that the book is deeply political through and through. The fact that it is politically instigated, so to speak, is only an indication of the book's essentially political quality.

The two volumes have one aim: to *accuse* thinking. No sooner is that said than a knowledge of Arendt's inevitable complexity presses back the simple assertion. I should say instead that the two volumes are a *qualified* accusation of thinking: an accusation qualified by love of the accused, a love constantly shown and expressed as the book's arguments unfold. Still, it would be too safe to say that all that Arendt is doing is having a lover's quarrel with thinking. There is an indictment in the book, an indictment of thinking in a book provoked by the dread hunch that much of the worst evil done in the world is done by those who are not capable of thinking.

To put it crudely, Arendt calls thinking as an activity to account because it is a withdrawal from the life of the senses, and because it is characteristically hostile to willing and hence to free action, especially political action. Her philosophical commitment is to the world—the world as our physical home and the world as the worldly scene of political action. This commitment seems to me to confer coherence on the book. What Arendt did in her last book, then, was to cope with an expanded range of considerations that were adversary to her commitment.

What is thinking? It is the silent speech that takes place inside oneself, "the soundless dialogue between me and myself," when one is disengaged from either the activities of life or even the mere observation of them. As Arendt defines it, its content may be any past experience, any event or situation in one's life or the lives of others. All thinking is animated by the search for meaning. Yet Arendt is mostly occupied with a particular sort of search, the effort to search out the meaning of existence. This is philosophical thinking. It starts, like all thinking, with experience, but does not confine itself to the meaning of the particular, as more ordinary thinking does. Philosophical thinking must be seen as the attempt to answer unanswerable questions, like the great traditional ones on God, freedom, and immortality. The actual world is not enough for the thinking mind when it works with a greater intensity than the ordinary mind—that is, when it is philosophical. Philosophical thinking is alienation from the world, and "world alienation" has always figured in Arendt's writings as one of the crucial aspects of the modern human condition. But

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where she had described this condition in previous work she had in mind the great mass of Europeans in the period between the two wars, who were uprooted and battered and who came to feel a terrifying loneliness and lostness—a feeling of being superfluous that totalitarian movements and regimes exploited, apparently assuaged, but actually furthered systematically. Now this very concept of world alienation is turned on philosophers all through the ages. Of course she traces it to a source that is not sociologically related to the condition of the European masses in an earlier generation. Philosophers deliberately and continuously, like the rest of us now and then, *cultivate* their alienation. They seek it out: to think is to leave the world. (One wants to say, to take leave of one's senses.)

Arendt is eloquent on the capacity of the "thinking ego" to be driven restlessly, or to drive itself restlessly, to find or impute meaning, and then to dissolve that meaning and look for another one. There is no doubt that she finds philosophical thinking heroic. It is a heroism built into the very nature of humanity. Although some persons never think, and most persons only now and then, there will always be some who will think because they cannot help it. In casting about for a metaphor to represent the activity of thinking, she finally settles on "the sensation of being alive." Unthinking men, like Eichmann, are "sleepwalkers." Truly, Arendt loves thinking, loves it so much as to consider a hypothetical world without it as nonhuman.

Nevertheless it is as if thinkers had to be reminded that there is a world, the world. "The sensation of being alive" is too close to being dead to the world, and is purchased at the cost of "de-sensing," dematerializing the things in it. The senses may not ultimately rebel and derange the thinker, but Arendt in the magnificent first part of *Thinking* speaks for them. When she dwells especially on seeing and being seen, her writing gives glory back to the physical world. There is the glory radiated by the being of creatures who are endowed with sensory capacities of varying kinds, and all of whom seek innately to explore and inhabit their world by means of those capacities. There is the greater glory created by the disposition that Arendt thinks all creatures have for self-display, for individuating themselves. She says: ". . . *whatever can see wants to be seen, whatever can hear calls out to be heard, whatever can touch presents itself to be touched.* It is indeed as though everything that is alive . . . has an *urge to appear,* to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its 'inner self' but itself as an individual." To read these pages is to have as striking an instance of Arendt's power of rediscovery as any in the body of her work. She enables us to look freshly; the look of things is made fresh. Paradoxically, she uses ideas to save the world of appearances. She claims that "nothing we see or hear or touch can be expressed in words that equal what is given to the senses." That may be; but she educates the sense of beauty, especially that of persons who often philosophically express contempt for "mere appearances." The affinity with early Greek reflection is strong, but there is a philosophical desperation in Arendt that makes her own expression work more intimately on us.

Thinking is withdrawal from appearances, a self-blinding to the shining of beautiful appearances. There are, however, some sources of thinking that retain a connection to appearances. Such a connection, intentionally or not, implies praise for the glory of the world. Arendt devotes the third part of *Thinking* to the question "What makes us think?" She takes up a number of Greek, Roman, and modern texts in order to detect an answer. She says she must use inference because so little is directly said by the thinking ego about its own necessities. She finds, as she was wont to find, the initial clue in Greek reflection before Plato. Then the presiding view was that "both the world and men stand in need of praise lest their beauty go unrecognized." Appearances shone, but they did not manifest meaning. To see the meaning of human and natural phenomena, there had to be a withdrawal into thinking. Meaning had to be distilled and could be distilled only by the kind of blindness that accompanies thinking. The greatest of all the poets who saw the meaning of past action and who made it into an immortal story was literally blind, and that blindness became emblematic for all seers, prophets, and bards. Blindness in the service of sight, thinking in the service of prais-

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ing life—Arendt's sympathies are here, though she will explore other answers to the question "What makes us think?"

She takes up the answer Plato gave once in passing: thinking in the form of philosophy begins in wonder, admiring wonder. The wonder comes from the hidden harmony of the whole rather than from the splendor of any particular. Appearances intimate an order: they have the dignity of leading us on to something better than themselves. The world seems to sustain a loss when the metaphysical is posited as superior to the physical. Yet in one of those turnings back on the self that Arendt excelled in, she suggests that there is an unexpected guarantee of reality to the physical when it is made to depend on the metaphysical. The loss of the "suprasensory" is the loss of the sensory, at least in a world totally lacking in all credible religious doctrine. In any case, Greek philosophy stays in touch with the world of appearances, even when Platonic wonder turns into Aristotelian perplexity.

After the Greeks, Arendt finds no answer to her question that honors the world and life in it, unless it be Nietzsche's. The unappeasable quest for meaning that drives all thinking did not and does not find sponsorship in "admiration, confirmation, and affirmation." The sense of the world's hostility is what impelled the Roman Stoics to thinking, and to find an inner refuge or a kind of medicine in it. Although this escapism is as old as wonder, Arendt maintains that no one acknowledged it before Cicero and Lucretius. Thinking for the Romans became a substitute world, a world elsewhere. In later thinking there is something like wonder at its source—shock that the world exists, that there is something rather than nothing. Even here, however, faith in God is presupposed, and demand for such a presupposition suggests the loss of the Greek ability to admire and affirm. The work of Hegel, directed as it is by the desire to find the basis for reconciling mind with the world, shows the same Roman terror of the world and the same Roman impulse to overcome terror by "transforming occurrences outside yourself into your own thoughts." When philosophers cannot praise life, they turn to theodicies. Nietzsche wants to bless life; Heidegger wants to see the origins of thinking in thanking, in being thankful that there is something rather than nothing, that Being calls to be heard. Yet in both there is finally an attitude toward Being that approaches abnegation or *Gelassenheit*, and this, for Arendt, seems to place human life in great jeopardy.

The history of the sources of thinking since the Greeks is a mostly uninterrupted, though richly various, avoidance of ravished wonder at the beauty of the world of appearances and the wish to shape that wonder into an imputation of meaning. Because of that, *Thinking* is a work of regret, if not of mourning. There is a contrary moment. Arendt says rather casually that the trouble with wonder as the source of thinking and with thinking as thanking is the amount of evil in the world. Such casualness may grate as a lapse in tone. But it should not. What writer has delineated evil's modern forms better than Arendt? Still, she insists that to see only evil is to want nothing rather than something. This is humanly intolerable, and in its coldness engenders no sustained thinking.

Who could speak of thinking and not consider Socrates? Arendt certainly could not. He was the hero of her first essay on thinking, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," the essay that grew out of her controversial assertion that Eichmann was unable to think. After discriminating among the sources of thinking which she finds in the history of the thinking ego's self-analysis, and feeling that her presentation is inconclusive and that her own general notion of the search for meaning as the source of thinking is too vague, she turns to Socrates. She presents him as the model thinker. He was possessed by the love of wisdom, an erotic need to apprehend the true nature of things. This need drove his mind in circles, never satisfied with any conclusion, constantly perplexed and wishing to have others share his perplexity. His effect was to intensify their sensation of being alive, though perhaps inhibiting their worldly life. But oddly, after praising Socrates for having a democratic soul, Arendt asserts that the Socratic location of the source of thought in eros must necessarily turn into an elitist separation of the few from the many. What *initially* made Socrates the model thinker was not so much that he was driven erotically to know

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and hence to question, doubt, and refute, as that he discovered the reason why that activity of thinking may tend to make the person forbear from terrible evil.

Her discussion is based on the two related contentions that Socrates makes in the *Gorgias*. First, "It is better to be wronged than to do wrong." Second, "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me." The first follows from the second. If one is disposed to think, one will be reproached by an inner voice if one does wrong. Thinking is precisely this two-in-one, this doubleness of mind, this talking to and talking back to oneself. The thinking person cannot bear reproach, self-reproach; it is worse harm than the harm another can inflict; there is no worse harm than inner division.

Arendt thus elaborates on the notion that those not able to think may cause much of the radical evil in the world. Here is the completion of the work on Eichmann and the banality of evil. Yet such a result is incidental to the work as a whole, I think. Not only does she seem almost too determined to distinguish the Socratic thinking ego from the common conception of conscience—as if to exonerate Socrates from the charge of having moralized the virility out of Athens. She herself is not interested in yoking thinking to goodness or even to decency. Doing so would cast a shadow on the passion for "admiration, confirmation, and affirmation." It may be that the amount of evil in the world creates "trouble" for this passion, as Arendt says. Despite that concession, she wants to free thinking from any strict moral association, to liberate it for that admiring wonder which transcends moral categories. If Socrates is *finally* the model thinker, that is not because the attempt to be like him would help make one incapable of atrocity, but rather because he was so energetic in his thinking and yet so ruthlessly without conclusions.

Thinking is least under accusation when it begins in wonder. How pitifully small is the number of philosophical thinkers who have begun there. Arendt's attack on those who begin instead with the need to escape from, or justify, the world takes not only the form of redescribing the physical world as suited to wonder, but also the form of explaining reductively the famous doctrinal conclusions, the finished products of thinking, that comprise the history of Western metaphysics. Throughout *Thinking* she refers to the most frequently studied philosophical systems as "fallacies." She means this term to cover such achievements as the Platonic doctrine of Forms, the Kantian concept of the thing in itself, and the Hegelian phenomenology. She is their close student, full of respect; she is scornful of those "Oxford" philosophers who literal-mindedly see mistakes in the metaphysical books. At the same time, she says, toward the end of *Thinking*, that her work is part of the *dismantling* of philosophy.

The dismantling consists in the novel interpretation she offers of the great systems. Knowingly or not, their great makers have in almost all cases produced metaphors of the activity of thinking itself. In straining to speak the truth about reality and the mind's relation to it, they have been throwing off hints about the process of thinking itself, the very process that inevitably engenders formal doctrines about reality and mind (except in the case of a pure thinker like Socrates, who was pure because he espoused no doctrine). Arendt means to free us of the criterion of truth when we approach metaphysical systems. She insists that truth is the proper criterion only of the labor of the *intellect:* trains of thought that issue in everyday or scientific "cognition" or knowledge. Meaning, on the other hand, is the criterion of the work of *reason:* trains of thought that issue from thinking. But it seems to me that Arendt concentrates the meaningfulness of metaphysical systems into one property, that of throwing some indirect illumination on thinking. To be freed of the criterion of truth is troubling enough to anyone who looks to philosophy for help in understanding the way things are. More troubling still is the claim that thinking is mostly about itself; or that, for philosophers, the world has existed so that the incredible difficulties connected with the phenomena of self-consciousness could be projected onto it, and thus made perhaps a little less difficult. Surely what Arendt says is profoundly suggestive; but I cannot help feel-

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ing that something has been needlessly lost when metaphysical doctrines are no longer studied as truth-obsessed responses to the mysteries of objective reality—curious, willful, slanted, and confusing as they all are, in some way. Metaphysicians may ask unanswerable questions and discover genuine antinomies, and Arendt is right to hoot at the positivists who hoot at the metaphysicians for taking so many seemingly unrewarding pains. I wonder, however, if metaphysicians would want to be saved as Arendt proposes. They may find they lose less dignity from positivist derision. The largest point is that the metaphysical investigation of the physical world of appearances does not have to imply ingratitude toward the world's beauty, or plain indifference to it, or outright loathing of the world because of its pain and evil. The necessities of rational inquiry—not the needs of the thinking ego—may lead the metaphysician on. I can do no more than suggest that Arendt's war on thinking, carried on alternatively by the praise of appearances and by the reductive interpretation of metaphysical doctrines, is driven by the desperate sense that thinking strengthens a pervasive suicidal tendency in the culture as a whole. World alienation turns into self-destruction. (The theme of suicide is quietly but persistently present in both volumes.)

I have already said that two reasons account for the indictment of thinking. The first has to do with thinking's tense relation with the world of appearances. The second is the hostility of most thinkers to the will, which is the source of free action, especially political action. I can take up this matter only briefly.

Willing is marked by the effort to show that, with rare exceptions, philosophers were unaware of the will or tried to destroy it by force of argument. What is willing? Arendt gives no neat definitional statement. It seems that willing is the silent speech which takes place inside oneself concerning future action or projects. It thus bears some resemblance to thinking, but thinking is mostly about the past, and its living experience resembles the *nunc stans*, the standing now, the present as eternity. Willing looks to the future as undetermined and hence as awaiting the will's determination. Arendt insists that willing is not reducible to thinking (just as no aspect of the life of the mind is reducible to any other). I suppose that acts of willing typically take the form of making resolves, deliberating, forming intentions, giving thought to what is to be done. Willing is not to be confused with desire, passion, or appetite. It is a verbal phenomenon. Arendt says that willing is truly known when the inner observer notices that willing is often divided against itself: no sooner do I make a resolve than I immediately discover in myself resistance to that resolve. A "counter-will" accompanies will. Or I will to do one thing and find myself doing the contrary. Christian thinkers, St. Paul and St. Augustine, are the great founding theoreticians of the will. The Christian experience is the precondition of this enlarged subjectivity. Later philosophers bear the brunt of Arendt's anger. She says that every theory of the will is a product of the thinking ego. The thinking ego prizes order and regularity; it hates contingency. Only with a principled belief in contingency does the will emerge as a sign of human honor, and does so as the exploiter of contingency, as the initiator of spontaneous, unpredictable, causally inexplicable action. She praises Duns Scotus as one of the few who may be said to have reveled in contingency. The Greeks knew the splendid reality of action, but they did not recognize the faculty of willing. Once that faculty is recognized, almost all conspire to obliterate it as a disturbance of the philosophical peace. For Arendt, the stakes are huge. Her life's work is in defense of freedom, especially freedom as political action, as founding polities and undertaking bold adventures. She insists that after the will has been "discovered," it must be preserved conceptually. The philosophers for the most part must be fought. She knows that the very notion of spontaneous action, of freedom as free will, is exceptionally problematic. But unless it is true, freedom is a lie. Freedom cannot be a lie. At the end she takes us back to those beloved men of revolutionary action whom she vivified in *On Revolution*. They demonstrated in their very deeds that freedom is no lie. They, not the philosophers, are the guarantors of human possibility.

Yet she gives the very last word to a philosopher, St. Augustine, the subject of her first book, a doctoral dissertation published fifty

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years ago. She finds in him the saving idea of *natality*. We are free because we are first babies and then children before we are adults. The freedom is in the absoluteness of beginning, and in that absoluteness the world renews itself with every human individual. Natality may unperplex the idea of freedom. It is right that her last written words should be those of "admiration, confirmation, and affirmation," and that they point to the simplest of facts and refresh our perception of them.

Modernist City

PETERSBURG. *By Andrei Bely. Translated, annotated, and introduced by Robert A. Maguire and John E. Malmstad. Indiana University Press. $17.50.*

Reviewed by ROBERT ALTER

Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* is almost enough to restore one's faith in the existence of the zeitgeist. Written during World War I (a first version was published in 1916), at the very moment when Joyce was laboring over *Ulysses* and Proust over his multivolume opus, when Virginia Woolf was conceiving a new program for centering the novel in consciousness, when Mann was experimenting with the composition of fiction through quasi-musical motifs, when Kafka was freeing the energies of fantasy from the old restraints of discursive consistency in plot and characterization, Bely, with little or no awareness of such European counterparts, realized these various innovative aims of the modernists in a single, luminous masterpiece.

The power of Bely's achievement was perceptible even in the irresponsible translation of John Cournos (1959), who saw fit to domesticate the stylistic eccentricities of the original, to lop off many of the expressions of Bely's fictional self-consciousness (his descriptive section-headings, his authorial intrusions, his reflections on the processes of fiction making), and in other ways to make this a less unconventional novel than it really is. Those of us who cannot read Russian therefore owe a special debt of gratitude to Robert Maguire and John Malmstad for their meticulous new translation, as well as for the copious notes (discreetly tucked into the back of the book) which elucidate the dense tangle of historical, cultural, and literary allusions out of which Bely wove his novel.

Because *Petersburg*, as Maguire and Malmstad make clear both in their notes and in their fine introduction, is such an intricate interlocking of imagistic and verbal motifs, sound patterns, formal themes, and parodistic allusions, one can scarcely hope in a brief review to give an adequate sense of what "happens," as complex, imaginative action, during the ten autumn days of 1905 covered in the novel. The phantasmagoric mental worlds of the principal characters stand in the foreground of our attention; the elements of plot that can be discerned through the shimmering play of elliptical ideas and images are a deliberate crossbreeding of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Nikolai Ableukhov, the son of a high-ranking czarist bureaucrat, has become involved with anarchists, at least two of whom are shadowy but grimly potent presences in the novel. They entrust him with a time bomb, intended to obliterate his father, but the Dostoevskian ticktock of its deadly mechanism serves principally to punctuate a distinctively modernist series of meditations on the nature of time and material extension, on the restrictions of individual existence and the horrors or delights of infinite expandability. The political intrigue is also complicated by a family intrigue. Nikolai's mother, who, like Karenin's unfaithful wife, is named Anna, has run off to Spain with an Italian lover, and she returns just as the revolutionary plan has been set in motion, and thus compounds the already abundant confusions of her son's oedipal ambivalence toward his father. The breakdown of authority within the family, like the threatened collapse of political order, leads the writer to characteristically twentieth-century reflections on the eclipse of European civilization, the crushing weight of the dead past felt all the way back to the Egyptian pyramids, and the imminent fulfillment of the biblical apocalypse, imagined chiefly in

● ROBERT ALTER, professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at the University of California–Berkeley, is author of *Partial Magic* and *Defenses of the Imagination*.

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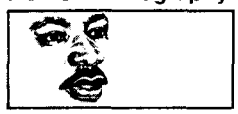

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the Asiatic hordes gathering against Russia.

Bely's handling of these typically modernist themes and techniques is in many ways distinctive, but I would single out for special attention his peculiar combination of hyperlucidity and mystification in the rendering of fictional action through the consciousness of the protagonists. Joyce adopted different strategies to simulate the rhythms and verbal textures of consciousness; Bely prefers to regard consciousness as a kind of poetic object, or a process he observes as it processes reality. "He was thinking, and he wasn't. His thoughts were thinking themselves, and they produced a picture: tarpaulins, hawsers, herring, sacks crammed full of something." Or, much later in the novel, the protagonist reflects on his experience of these past twenty-four hours that have been measured by the lethal metronome of the time bomb: "All these past few hours, fragments of thoughts had been floating before his eyes, in a play of starlike sparks, like the gay tinsel on a Christmas tree. They fell ceaselessly into a place illuminated by consciousness—out of darkness into darkness."

Consciousness, so beautifully limned in the metaphor of sparks momentarily illuminated, is surrounded by darkness as a matter of ontological fact, and Bely faithfully translates this sense of reality into a novelistic technique in which sharply defined images, often only fragmentarily revealed, flash out at us and are instantly swallowed up. Sometimes the effect reminds one of avant-garde cinema: carriages rolling through the nocturnal gloom detected only by the bloodred glimmer of their lamps, which is then engulfed in fog; elaborate mirror scenes in which all figures are seen at oblique angles as wavering reflections that vanish with the moving viewpoint of the observer.

But perhaps the most striking expression of Bely's sense of consciousness as sliding fragments of bright perception against a background of roiling darkness is his repeated use of synecdoche as a mode of vision. The idea, certainly in its more comic manifestations, was obviously suggested to him by Gogol, although in Bely it is more pervasive as a way of seeing the world than it is in Gogol. We are not privileged, as in the convention of omniscience of the nineteenth-century novel, to see human figures or objects in their wholeness; what strikes the observing eye is a piece of attire, a single prominent feature, a segment of silhouette, from which the rest, perhaps, may be inferred. Here is Bely at his most Gogolian, rendering a crowd scene: "Rolling toward them down the street were many-thousand swarms of bowlers. Rolling toward them were top hats, and the froth of ostrich feathers. Noses sprang out from everywhere." More tensely, with greater attention to the psychological state of the particular observing consciousness, Bely reports at the beginning of the novel the view of another crowd by his senior bureaucrat:

> Contemplating the flowing silhouettes, Apollon Apollonovich likened them to shining dots. One of these dots broke loose from its orbit and hurtled at him with dizzying speed, taking the form of an immense crimson sphere—
>
> —among the bowlers on the corner, he caught sight of a pair of eyes. And the eyes expressed the inadmissible. They recognized him, they grew rabid, dilated, lit up, and flashed.

Like countless passages in *Petersburg*, every detail is perfectly right in context and perfectly resonant with the larger structures of the novel. The aged senator sees the crowd not as a whole or as an assemblage of discriminated faces but as dots, bowler hats, and then, among them, he makes out a single pair of eyes, because that fragmentary vision corresponds both to the optic facts of perception and to his sense of isolation and acute vulnerability in this revolutionary time. The round dots and hurtling sphere are also part of a motif-system of circles, spheres, and planetary orbits through which the apocalyptic themes of the novel as well as Bely's anthroposophic interest in astral travel are brilliantly focused. The sphere is crimson, and the eyes flash, in consonance with the color motif of red associated with saturnalian license, deviltry, revolution, and explosive destruction. Even the lurching shift in proportion from immense sphere to a pair of eyes is faithful both to the perceptual unsteadiness of this uneasy observer and to larger ontological considerations in the novel of sudden contractions and expansions between the infinitesimal and the infinite.

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This is a relatively simple example of the kind of integrating imaginative activity that goes on throughout the book. *Petersburg* is one of those very rare novels in which virtually everything works splendidly together; it is a pleasure at last to be able to read it in this admirable English version.

Women Outside History

COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN: AN IDEA IN FICTION. *By Nina Auerbach. Harvard University Press. $11.50.*

Reviewed by JULIA PREWITT BROWN

Nina Auerbach's study opens with references to mythic communities of women and concludes with contemporary ideas on the subject in literature, philosophy, and politics. In between, a wide array of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels are compared and discussed in relation to the book's theme. In the breadth of its selections, then, the study implies that the concept of a women's community somehow transcends history, yet it puts forth a historical argument concerning the development of this concept in literature. This contradiction is one of the book's weaknesses, but it may be inherent in the phenomenon of women's studies itself.

The book is organized around several highly interesting and original comparisons: between Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, between Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, between George Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Henry James's *The Bostonians*. In a final and most remarkable chapter, Nina Auerbach moves deftly from the novels of Muriel Spark, Djuna Barnes, and Monique Wittig to the speeches of Ti-Grace Atkinson.

The general argument of *Communities of Women* concerns the changing relationship between communities of women and the "history" or "reality" that surrounds them. In Austen, Alcott, Gaskell, and Brontë, Auerback argues, communities of women are "the self-renouncing attendants to the covert antagonists of a history that has consistently taken the shape of literal or economic warfare." Later in the century, in the novels of Gissing and James, these communities rise to become the "appropriators" and "redeemers" of historical reality. And in the contemporary works of Spark, Barnes, and Wittig, female communities take full possession of previously masculine territory. "[No] longer the antagonists of masculine 'reality' and 'truth,' " their communities become its symbolic embodiment. These novelists "deny the segregation of a female world by taking to themselves the violent heart of surrounding masculinity"—that is, by assimilating masculine values. Auerbach concludes with the assertion, following the ideas of Ti-Grace Atkinson, that there is no longer such a thing as a "private, female world." All its cherished constituents, "love, pregnancy, sex, and madness . . . are forcibly yoked to public, political life." The feminist novel of this century, having appropriated "violence, God, history, and the quest," suggests that the tradition Auerbach has defined will no longer continue in the novel; it has disappeared by sheer expansion.

Significantly, Auerbach's comparisons begin with novels written in the nineteenth century. She overlooks that fact that the idea of a separate women's community within a culture first arose out of a process of capitalist industrialization, when the production of goods was removed from the home. As Eli Zaretsky explains, "The idea that the economy and the family are two separate and autonomous realms," rather than one integrated system, "is specific to capitalist society," and is an illusion that contemporary feminism has often left unchallenged. Capitalism is sustained in part by the socially necessary but private labor of housewives and mothers. Auerbach's study of Jane Austen is predicated upon this dichotomy between the family and economy, between women and "history," even though Austen wrote about a section of society that was struggling to retain its agrarian, home-centered economic power. Hence, she writes, *Pride and Prejudice* is "remote from the main theatre of action . . . deprived of outside reality and power." Whereas James and Gissing endow their fe-

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male communities with "the burden of historical reality," Jane Austen's novels "celebrate the rift that lies between one's own world and history."

This view approaches the old-fashioned complaint that Jane Austen should have written about the Napoleonic Wars. Auerbach accepts the notion that until the twentieth century "history" was exclusively "masculine," and that marriage and the family are ahistorical subjects. This is precisely the attitude that Jane Austen's novels challenge in their representation of the family as a social and political institution, in their awareness that personal life is not "private" but "collective" and "representative" of class. In the society she wrote about, marriage was, in her own words, "the origin of change." The gentry and its lands were highly mobile, and marriage was the primary means by which the landed class maintained its power. Austen shows the marriage decisions of her women characters to be full of historical and moral resonance. To say, as Auerbach does, that "the historical reality of women is the force of their communities" is to ignore the historical and economic significance of marriage and the family, made known to us by historians such as Sheila Rowbothan and Lawrence Stone, as well as to negate the achievements of many individual women of genius who worked or wrote in solitude.

In the analyses of *Little Women* and *Cranford* we see that Alcott and Gaskell accepted the euphemism of a separate, morally superior community of women in their diminutive female utopias. But these novels, far from being the radical, almost visionary works Auerbach suggests they are, confirm the split and duplicitous structure of capitalist/sexist ideology, in which women occupy an ideal realm outside the culture as a means of ignoring their subordinate place within it. Feminists in the nineteenth century drew their strength from the myth of female superiority, and by the time of James and Gissing, the hope that women would be a cleansing force within the culture was widespread. Auerbach credits these authors with endowing women with "historical reality" for the first time. "Women today want to be the first and only generation to seize the time. . . . But this triumphant alliance [between women and history] has been forged and broken before." Surely there is a difference between power realized by women themselves and power bestowed on them by male novelists, who, as Auerbach astutely points out, may have been using feminism for other political aims: "[The] women's revolution may have brought about an uneasy marriage between their social guilt and their aesthetic instincts."

The American idolatry of women is particularly equivocal. When Tocqueville came to America in the 1830s, the authority of women was so noticeable that he devoted several chapters to it in *Democracy in America*, implying that American women are a species of the larger genus of Americans. He even made the extraordinary claim that, if asked "to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of [the American] people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply: To the superiority of their women." Like James's and Gissing's belief in the collective influence of women, Tocqueville's claim establishes women as moral servants to a masculine reality.

The example of Gissing and James is typical of Auerbach's tendency to bring literary and historical experience into a confusing relationship. On the one hand, she sees their novels as historical events in the development of feminist thought, but not, on the other hand, as documents requiring historical research for their illumination—the implication being that the rise of feminism took place only in the literary imagination. In much of the book, however, this does not matter. The individual literary analyses are valuable and interesting in themselves. Still, a little more attention to historical detail would have added to Auerbach's argument. Take this passing reference to Florence Nightingale: "One image of the twentieth century has been a community of women healing a world whose adventures allow it to thrive: Florence Nightingale's mid-Victorian regiment of women has returned from far-off Scutari to transfigure and possess its homeland." This is true to the myth of Florence Nightingale, but not to fact, and it reduces her achievement for that reason. Florence Nightingale herself said that the specific business of nursing was "the least important of the functions into

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which she had been forced." In Scutari especially, her achievement was not in nursing, in being the ministering angel, the "lady with the lamp," but in administration, in her genius for organization and for cutting through government bureaucracy. Only through feminizing her character could her power and authority be accepted by soldiers, administrators, and, finally, posterity. More attention to the relationship between women's historical achievements and the myths that have distorted them would have added richness to Auerbach's argument.

Had this been considered, the twentieth-century works examined in the last chapter would not seem so radical a departure from all that has gone before. This is the book's finest chapter—a rhapsodic, incisive, and courageous discussion of feminist fiction and thought in our own century. Because the modern novel often asserts the dominance of imagination over historical reality, Auerbach's emphasis on the literary imagination of communities of women is fully rewarded here. In her attention to the radical lesbian feminism of Wittig and Atkinson, she takes the study of female communities to its logical conclusion—while at the same time recognizing that this is not a conclusion but a beginning, "a token of women's new power to abandon the impotent pseudo-sanctity of their 'counter-universe' for political and psychic centrality."

I have suggested that writers before our century, like Jane Austen, have asserted the political and psychic centrality of women, and that real women like Florence Nightingale have denied the pseudo-sanctity of the counter-universe, even though myths have clouded that denial. But the rise of lesbian feminism belongs to this century alone. On the one hand, it can be viewed as the revolutionary result of the sexual polarization that took place in Victorian capitalistic society. Oscar Wilde's homosexuality, for example, was different from earlier homosexuality of the period only because he saw it as such and chose to invest it with political meaning, to make it politically symbolic. "Sexual politics" may have begun with Oscar Wilde, and Kate Millett recognizes his importance in her book of that title. But the political meaning of lesbianism is quite different, since women

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make up an oppressed class and Wilde was the member of a privileged one. As I think Auerbach implies, only radical lesbian feminism has the self-sufficiency of a revolutionary movement. And it is mainly the radical lesbian novelists who have consciously sought to conquer the "other" masculine reality through assimilating it. The obvious self-defeating paradox here is that lesbian feminism encases women in a sexual identity as tightly as, say, Austen's society enclosed her women in a female role. The women in Monique Wittig's novel about the training and triumph of a female army exist as nothing *other* than body.

Communities of Women is predicated on the absoluteness of its concept of a universal community of women in the literary imagination. In that sense the book is necessarily mythic, rather than historical, in its concerns—absorbing as it does one myth of femininity after another until, in contemporary literature, the psychic perimeters of the female world become so broad they disappear. "The tradition I have defined," Auerbach concludes, "will no longer survive in the novel, having evaporated by taking everything to itself."

Serious Nonsense

THE NEW OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH LIGHT VERSE. *Chosen by Kingsley Amis. Oxford University Press. $13.95.*

Reviewed by RUTH BOORSTIN

It has been said that humor in a poem is like an egg in the kitchen, for in the hands of an artist the possibilities are limitless. In putting together *The New Oxford Book of English Light Verse*, Kingsley Amis professes that he hardly needed to think of how to define light verse. His introduction points out that light verse is severely technical work that cannot be written in a nonchalant spirit. "A concert pianist is allowed a wrong note here and there; a juggler is not allowed to drop a plate." It is lighthearted, airy, enlivening, disrespectful, but never beautiful or unfunny or whimsical. Amis omits most satire because it raises a sneer rather than a smile. He favors the subversive—ungentlemanly poetry that strikes back at the elevated, the stilted, the refined. To him light verse is "low" verse with impropriety as its chief weapon.

Admitting that much light verse is an exercise in virtuosity, Amis approves the deadly mixture of smooth word and irreverent sentiment found in the best of vers de société. He emphasizes the intimate and essential relationship of light verse to all the other poetry extant at the time of composition. Have the little magazines "that died to make verse free" killed off the possibility of light verse today? Perhaps. For when high verse abandons form, light verse has nothing to push against. Only political ephemera, limericks, and literary exercises are possible, according to Amis, who includes no writers born after the twenties and has small hopes for the future.

We inevitably compare the Amis volume with its predecessor of forty years ago, that curious anthology of similar name (*The Oxford Book of Light Verse*) edited by W. H. Auden. The two books have little in common but their format. Seduced by his egalitarian political enthusiasms of the United Front era, Auden came up with a definition of light verse emphasizing "the speaking voice." He required that the poets in his selection be "in sufficient intimacy with their audience to be able to forget themselves and their singing robes." If the poet writes unselfconsciously in his own language about the social life of men and women, what he writes will be light verse, as Auden defined it, whether written for performance, for the sharing of everyday experience, or as nonsense-fun. If the poet succumbs to romanticism and starts exploring his inner world, good-bye to light verse.

Auden's medley, then, was heavily weighted with folksongs, nineteenth-century poetry for children, ballads, and nonsense rhymes. The contributor who most often met his standards was that ubiquitous troubadour, that writer of all seasonings, that mysterious stranger of, by, and for the people, Ibid's big brother Anon. But, as Kingsley Amis points out, the gap between Auden's statement of

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principles and Auden's actual selections widened as he moved toward his own time. Pope, with his carefully shaped heroic couplets, is but one of the self-conscious poets whom Auden included. The conversational tone is absent more often than not in the vers de société of Macaulay, Praed, and a sheaf of others including Jane Taylor, the coy author of "Recreation" and the only woman in Auden's collection. By stretching or ignoring his own definition, Auden opened his anthology to the English Greats—Blake, Burns and Coleridge, Chaucer, Spenser and Wordsworth, Yeats, Fielding, and Herrick. The classical poets, "simple, clear and gay" in Auden's words, appear freely in the 1938 Oxford edition.

You will not find nearly as many of them in Amis's collection. Amis and Auden do overlap somewhat in their choice of authors, though in few of the items selected. Some of the best verses in both are by Belloc and Byron, Chesterton and Lewis Carroll, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, and Swift. Ninety writers of light verse appear exclusively in the Auden volume and 126 others only in the Amis edition—as against the 40 who appear in both books.

Are there raisins in this pudding? Of course there are many. It is fun to browse in the timeless wit of Ben Jonson's "On Giles and Joan" and to reread Samuel Butler's comic burlesque of Puritanism in "Hudibras." Anyone who has recently visited the polder works of Holland will be struck by how apt are the seventeenth-century observations of Andrew Marvell. The Dutch, he wrote,

> dived desperately for each piece
> Of earth, as if't had been of ambergris;
> Collecting anxiously small loads of clay
> Less than what building swallows bear away . . .

Jonathan Swift's "Twelve Articles" on keeping friends are as wise now as in his day:

> Never will I give advice
> Till you please to ask me thrice;
> Which if you in scorn reject,
> 'Twill be just as I expect.

The mock heroics of Samuel Wesley's "Pindaric on the Grunting of a Hog," or Thomas Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Fa-

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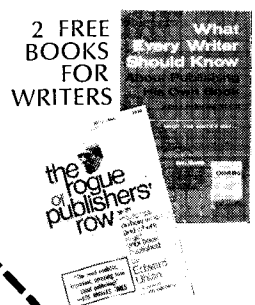

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vourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes," or Robert Southey's "Ode to a Pig While His Nose Was Being Bored" are exuberant and diverting, the work of skilled professionals. Ebenezer Elliott's quatrain "On Communists" has an edge to it:

> What is a Communist? One who has yearnings
> For equal division of unequal earnings;
> Idler or bungler, or both, he is willing
> To fork out his penny and pocket your shilling.

Oliver Wendell Holmes is here with an especially zany poem, one new to me: "Aestivation: An Unpublished Poem of My Late Latin Tutor," which ends:

> Oh, might I vole to some umbrageous clump,—
> Depart,—be off,—excede,—evade,—erump!

Here are plenty of old familiars like T. S. Eliot's "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" and, inevitably, Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful James." And the less dog-eared parodies of these, though they smack a little of undergraduate or common-room humor: A. C. Hilton's "The Heathen Pass-ee," Lewis Carroll's "Hiawatha's Photographing," and Edward Blishen's winning "Abroad Thoughts": "Oh, not to be in England / Now that April's there!"

One of my favorites is by a man named Desmond Skirrow who laconically summarized the "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Gods chase / Round vase. / What say? / What play? / Don't know. / Nice, though."

Observers of today's frantic marital swappings and leavings can see the shrewdness of Wynford Vaughan-Thomas's observation in "To His Not-so-Coy Mistress": "For those who sipped Love in their prime / Must gulp it down at Closing Time."

It is good to have Auden's and Amis's own witty works well and copiously represented. Auden's "Letter to Lord Byron" devotes a stanza to Light Verse, who, "poor girl, is under a sad weather: . . . She's treated as *démodé* altogether," in which there is both truth and poetry.

The reader is bound to quibble with some choices. To call light verse Robert Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," that bitter character study of a monk exploding with meanness and hatred, is sheer perversity. But what is wrong with this book is more than cause for quibbles. Amis leans over backward to exclude the topical, and with near pedantry chops off some beloved branches from this special kind of poetry. The light verse writers of the twenties may have been bourgeois but they were clever—and widely read. Amis is stuffy in his choice of vers de société writers and I find it hard to forgive him. Where are Dorothy Parker, Richard Armour, Guy Wetmore Carryl, John Updike, Ogden Nash? Phyllis McGinley is not just the only woman in this collection but the only representative of a generation of merry versifiers on whom many of us grew up. It is pretentious to distill them all out.

If light verse is not one thing but many, we should surely be allowed to mingle with the whole lighthearted generation whom Amis has slighted. The reader is left disappointed at not meeting old friends, and not so sure that he wants to spend the whole evening with Amis's!

Intellectual Flâneur

REFLECTIONS: ESSAYS, APHORISMS, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS. *By Walter Benjamin. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Edited and with an introduction by Peter Demetz. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $12.95.*

Reviewed by ROBERT M. ADAMS

When Walter Benjamin committed suicide in 1940, at the age of forty-eight, he left a vast and varied legacy of writings, the least part of which were the books he had published. These amounted, in fact, to two volumes of criticism dealing with somewhat distant aspects of German literature (baroque tragedy and romantic art criticism) and two collections of autobiographical fragments, aphorisms, and short essays. But in addition to these four volumes there were a great number of periodical pieces—essays, reviews, sketches, contributions to conferences, in-

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troductions to translations, unpublished studies, and a very sizable mass of correspondence. Surprisingly (for Benjamin was not only Jewish but Marxist, and his papers were for a long time in Nazi hands), much of his work survived. A two-volume collection of *Schriften* was issued at Frankfurt in 1955; two volumes of correspondence were published in 1966; and now a presumably definitive collection of *Gesammelte Schriften*, including a fuller collection of the still-scattered journalism and previously unpublished materials, has been appearing since 1972.

As can be seen, the bibliography is basically untidy in itself, and the confusion has been augmented by the way in which fragments of it have been appearing in English—in a pair of catchall sampler collections. Benjamin was not simply a versatile fellow with a pen; he underwent several different intellectual phases, so sharply divided as to amount almost to several different personalities. When the products of these phases are bundled together, often without adequate definition of the circumstances under which they first appeared, the result is, not surprisingly, a somewhat blurry image of the author.

Illuminations was the first English collection, published in 1968 with an introduction, primarily a biographical memoir, by Hannah Arendt. Its aim was to present Benjamin as a literary critic, and the selections pointed strongly that way—nine out of ten were directly literary. The present volume, *Reflections*, comprises eighteen essays, also selected by the late Professor Arendt but this time with an eye to giving a wider and more various view of Benjamin's work than the first volume provided. They include autobiographical sketches, travel pieces, some political philosophizing, two or three examples of literary or artistic commentary, and some theoretical speculations on language. An extensive introduction is provided by Professor Peter Demetz. Not to overlook any of the amenities, let it be said that Edmund Jephcott is the translator of *Reflections*, as Harry Zohn was the translator of *Illuminations*.

The essays in this newest collection differ among themselves, not only in their subject matter, their tonality, their implicit premises, and their polemical tendencies, but even more strikingly in the levels of specific mental

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preparation that they seem to take for granted. Broadly speaking, the essays are arranged in ascending order of difficulty—or descending order of accessibility, if you will—and the spectrum is inordinately wide. The several essays that describe Benjamin's bourgeois beginnings in Berlin, and the several cities through which he delighted to saunter as an anthologist of unconsidered trifles, will appeal to a thousand readers for every single reader who will be able, or willing, to work his way through the dense philosophical abstractions of the essay on language, with its extraordinarily preemptive terminology. Dates of publication, often posthumous in any case, do nothing to help one to sort out the different essays that, dating from radically different areas of Benjamin's life, jostle one another unconscionably in the collection. For example, the "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," which is listed in the editor's note as published in 1966 and was actually written in 1916, would be much clearer if a simple "*Aetatis suae*, 24" were appended to it.

There is little question that Benjamin's was a powerful and independent mind, with a particular horror of clichés and unctuous middle-class formulas. Even in his most casual and apparently dilettantish moods, he did not object to the hard conclusion. Among his contemporaries, he felt most attracted to the dour personality of Brecht, the grim vision of Kafka. But this is rarefied company, and Benjamin was a less integrated personality than either of those figures with whom, in different arenas, he was called to wrestle. He underwent more distinct phases than they did, and took (as they did not) the coloration of several successive influences. His work does not stand before us as monolithic—a point Professor Demetz makes by strong indirection when he suggests that we should read Benjamin "musically." I suppose this means giving more or less equal emphasis to his Hegelian, Marxist, Gnostic, dandy, sociological, nostalgic, and Zionist phases, on the score that they all contribute to a total harmony, or perhaps discord.

A last preliminary problem with Benjamin's writings as they are reaching English readers is the dense and at the same time casual character of his allusions. He was one of the extended and, on the whole, happy family of European authors, and he assumed that those for whom he wrote possessed an imposing range of literary associations. To translate his language out of German is relatively easy (and it should be said at once that both his translators have done excellent jobs); but to translate his thought out of the tangle of Germanic allusions and associations with which it is interwoven is a much harder task, which indeed has scarcely been attempted. In the indexes to both collections of his essays, the editors have provided little one-phrase identifications, which are as absurd where they are not needed (Heine, James Joyce, Molière) as they are inadequate where they are needed. Benjamin, who was nothing if not a bookish man, grew up in a climate where Haecker and Hamann, Hauff, Heissenbüttel, Heinle, the brothers Herzfelde, and Ludwig Heinrich Hölty were as the air he breathed; his allusions to them are a kind of literary shorthand, perfectly understood in the milieu for which he wrote but likely to fall on deaf ears outside it. A striking instance is the longish essay on Karl Kraus, a figure who would have been perfectly well known to a Viennese of the period between the two wars, but who is not exactly a household word in the English-speaking world of 1978. Benjamin's attitude toward Kraus is oddly mixed and compounded, to the point that Kraus himself is said to have remarked that he couldn't understand the essay. It was excluded from the first collection, *Illuminations*, on the prudent grounds that neither Kraus nor the figures with whom he was associated nor the issues with which he dealt were accessible to English readers. Why it is now printed as part of *Reflections* is far from clear.

Berlin, Moscow, Marseilles, Naples, Paris: the first half of *Reflections* amounts to an impressionable journalist's saunter through the streets of some highly interesting cities—a charming, low-key travelogue. The second half, increasingly abstract and increasingly opaque, deals with literary phenomena (Surrealism, Brecht, Kraus), violence, fate and character, language (as such), and the mimetic faculty. It did not seem to this reviewer that any of these essays was worthy to stand with "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which was the highlight

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of *Illuminations*. That essay dealt directly with man's relation to things; and this, rather than the area of political or linguistic philosophy, appears to be the area where Benjamin had the most original and important things to say. The best of the present batch of essays seems to me that on the surrealists, in which Benjamin celebrates their difficult achievement of profane illumination, their skill in releasing the energies of outmoded forms. This is preeminently his topic; it is a key to his interest in Baudelaire and Proust, and it is the concern that gives special interest to his wandering through city streets. On the other hand, he is less fortunate in dealing with political theory. His critique of violence seems in 1978 almost pathetically limited by its bookish Marxism, and the discussions with Brecht give one the impression of two brilliant minds in chains that they only occasionally venture to rattle gently.

I think we now have enough of Walter Benjamin's miscellaneous essays to make clear to any interested reader that here is a mind of unusual, if extremely uneven, quality. The circumstances under which he wrote, and some element of his own nature that led him not only to diffuse his energies, but to veil himself in causes remote from his own character and talents, and ultimately to seek misfortune as a bride—all this makes access to the core of his thought very difficult indeed. There are opulent oases in his writing, but a lot of desert in between. In the end, it is possible that Professor Demetz's suggestion that we read him "musically" points in exactly the wrong direction. Instead, we should read him in pieces, and assemble the bits according to preconceived thematic interests of our own, rather than trying to form any sort of agglomerate. Whether Benjamin is a major twentieth-century critic, as has been loudly proclaimed, seems to me, after the publication of *Reflections*, still a moot question. It will be interesting to see what those who have trumpeted the glad tidings manage actually to do with the insights they have gleaned from the writings of Walter Benjamin. For with critical insights, as with scientific hypotheses, the best proof of their value is the further speculation to which they give rise.

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In the Shadow of Giants

NIKOLAI LESKOV: THE MAN AND HIS ART. *By Hugh McLean. Harvard University Press. $30.*

Reviewed by JOSEPH FRANK

It has been known for many years that Professor Hugh McLean has been preparing a definitive book about Nikolai Leskov, and the present work is the culmination of his long and devoted labors on behalf of this comparatively little known (at least in the English-speaking world) Russian novelist. Leskov is perhaps the best of that galaxy of minor nineteenth-century Russian novelists who have been completely overshadowed by the triumvirate of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky (with Goncharov not far behind as a fourth). It is good to be reminded from time to time that the Russian novel is not composed exclusively of their creations, overpowering as they may be. And Leskov has also recently become better known, at least to people interested in contemporary criticism, because of the growing reputation of Walter Benjamin, whose article on Leskov as a writer of tales is now often cited and referred to in discussions of the theory of prose fiction. With the publication of Professor McLean's monumental book, there is no longer any reason for those interested in Russian literature to remain ignorant of the career and works of this talented writer, whose books give one the "feel" of wide areas of Russian life left largely untouched by his greater contemporaries.

Leskov obtained his vast knowledge of the Russian lower classes by firsthand experience. As a young man he worked as a clerk in the criminal court of the district where he lived. Later he traveled extensively throughout the country as a commercial agent, working for his British uncle, Alexander Scott, who administered the extensive estates of wealthy Russian landowners. Leskov spoke of these years as providing him with a store of impressions and observations that he embodied in his stories and novels; and it is interesting to note that he began his literary career by writing muckraking articles devoted to matters of topical concern. He did not start off with attempts at fiction or poetry, like so many other writers; nor is there even any evidence of early literary ambition.

Leskov's work always remained close to the harsh and hard realities of Russian life and its day-to-day texture. If his writings lack the imaginative depth and ideological scope of his great countrymen, they make up for it in the vividness and understanding with which they depict a Russian world quite different from that of the ideologues and aristocrats who people the best known Russian nineteenth-century fiction. Leskov's tender and moving depiction of the provincial clergy in his excellent *Cathedral Folk*, and of the fanatical religiosity of the Old Believers in *The Sealed Angel* (which also contains one of the first admiring discussions of icon-painting written for the general public) broke new ground in Russian literature, as did his picaresque account in *The Enchanted Pilgrim* of how an adventurous serf finally entered a monastery.

Leskov was a proud, passionate, and frequently irascible character who, in the course of his life, managed to quarrel with almost everyone he knew, as well as with all the current tendencies and movements in Russian literature. This also tells us something about his fierce independence, his refusal to kowtow to the ideological shibboleths of the moment. His most widely known quarrel, which led to his virtual ostracism by the radicals for most of his life, involved the famous Saint Petersburg fires of 1862, which coincided roughly with the circulation of the bloodthirsty *Young Russia* proclamations calling for the extermination of the royal family and all its adherents. It was generally believed that the radicals had started the blaze, and the student population in general was suspected by the populace to be in sympathy with the presumed arsonists. Leskov printed an article intended to protect the students, asking the police, if there were any evidence of arson, to name the culprits so that suspicion could be removed from those who were blameless.

JOSEPH FRANK is professor of comparative literature at Princeton University, and director of the Christian Gauss Seminars. He is the author of *The Widening Gyre* and of *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, the first volume of a projected four-volume critical biography.

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Nothing, at first sight, would seem to be more harmless than such a request; but the fact that Leskov lent some credence to the charge of arson, and seemingly appealed to the police against the radicals, was enough to make him a marked man. Professor McLean rather pooh-poohs Leskov's bitter and frequent complaints about the effect of this literary quarantine on his career. It did not, to be sure, stop him from writing, but he was forced to publish in obscure and second-rate periodicals and felt unjustly deprived of his proper audience and larger recognition. Even a better-balanced personality might well have become exasperated; and there seems something uncharitable in denying Leskov the right to his resentments. Indeed, the vendetta of the radicals has continued to pursue him right up to the present: Leskov's argument with the radicals of his time, Professor McLean writes, "has made him an object of suspicion forever," and even today in the Soviet Union his work is published only in expurgated editions.

Professor McLean's book is unquestionably a major scholarly achievement, certainly one of the most impressive works on a Russian writer to be published in the English language; and it is probably the most complete study of Leskov available anywhere. A useful summary in the preface gives the essence of Professor McLean's views on his controversial subject:

> Although he [Leskov] toyed briefly with radicalism in the early 1860s, he remained basically a liberal and gradualist, who believed in working for reforms within the existing system rather than pulling it to pieces and starting afresh. Philosophically, his quest for a viable Weltanschauung took him not to Western secularism and Socialism, as it did so many of his contemporaries, but back to a Christianity originally more or less in harmony with official Eastern Orthodoxy, but later developing into a thoroughgoing "Protestant" moralism that eventually merged with Tolstoy's. Leskov ardently believed in the didactic powers of literature, and he was also convinced that lasting improvements in the human condition could only be achieved by raising the moral standards of individuals, not by tinkering with social forms.

On this latter point, one might add, he was in agreement with Dostoevsky as well as Tol-

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stoy, and profoundly in the Russian tradition still represented by Solzhenitsyn.

This quotation says little about Leskov as a writer, but Professor McLean pays close and careful attention to style as well as theme, and grapples manfully with the difficult problem of conveying Leskov's intricate linguistic effects to the uninitiated. Much of Leskov's work is in the *skaz* form, and depends on narrative tone and attitude indicated largely through subtle shifts in language. This is one reason why he is so difficult to translate, and why his work loses so much even when the translation is conscientious. Nor was Leskov really a novelist: he did his best work in the shorter forms, and his longer works are usually ill constructed—simply a collection of stories and anecdotes strung together, sometimes in a very artificial, awkward manner.

While I am filled with admiration for Professor McLean's knowledge and industry, his book has nonetheless left me with a feeling of some dissatisfaction. For he has a tendency toward what the Germans call *Besserwisserei* that becomes quite annoying as one reads on, and he adopts an attitude of superiority to his subject that seems quite unwarranted and terribly naïve in its quondam sophistication. McLean has been convinced by Freud that what Leskov depicts so often as Christian love and charity is really ignorance of the true motives of the human libido, and he is constantly showing up poor Leskov's self-delusion. As an example, here is a passage about *Cathedral Folk:*

> Victorian eyes were always ready to mist at . . . spectacles of sinless love and saintly virtue in humble circumstances. Twentieth-century readers, however, their innocence lost to Freud, may be aware of the self-indulgences disguised in the fantasy. Pizonsky's sexual confusion makes his motherhood hard to accept as pure Christian charity [he has adopted an orphan], and Tuberozov's admiration of such "lesser brethren" [he is a priest] may seem too patronizing to be genuine.

Perhaps so; but it may be suggested that this is hardly the way to appreciate what is unique in Leskov, who writes so often of his *pravedniki*, the saintly and self-sacrificing, and who manages, despite Professor McLean's strictures, to convince us of their human reality and possibility in a way that Dickens, for example, was quite unable to do. To take Freud as one's sole guide to the range of human motivation and human feeling is to approach literature with blinkers. Hamlet is more than the Oedipus complex, and Pizonsky and Tuberozov are more than sexual confusion and patronizing superiority.

Dry Welles

ORSON WELLES: A CRITICAL VIEW. *By André Bazin. Harper & Row. $10.*

THE MAGIC WORLD OF ORSON WELLES. *By James Naremore. Oxford University Press. $15.95.*

Reviewed by VERNON YOUNG

There is something peculiarly gratuitous about the publication in English now of André Bazin's 1958 monograph on Orson Welles. In view of the abundant Welles criticism that has since accumulated, the publisher has not worked very persuasively to assure us that a translation of this essay (far fewer than a hundred pages) was imperative. Peter Bogdanovich, quoted on the jacket, names Bazin "the most influential modern film critic"—an opinion I find puzzling if not preposterous, unless the influence prevails in France, where the type of airless intellectualism and special pleading displayed by Bazin is commonly found tolerable. Bazin's contribution to an appreciation of Orson Welles's innovations (up to 1958, when Bazin died), comprises a half-dozen pages of the whole book, of which the substance, as well as the limitations of viewpoint, is more lucidly elaborated by James Naremore in the other book I am reviewing.

Orson Welles created a visual world all his own from the several experiments of other filmmakers, in order to express, with maximum effect, the *essential* relationships of his characters to one another, to their setting, and to a social ethos suggestively defined by that setting. In *Citizen Kane* and in *The Magnificent Ambersons* the principal, but not the sole, instrument of Welles's transfiguring

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style was the depth-of-field devised by Gregg Toland. Fifteen years later, when Welles had arrived at *Touch of Evil* (here I quote Bazin),

> the wide-angle lens [18.55 mm] is used with a diabolical cleverness and mastery, its optical qualities are exploited to the maximum in long sequence shots which conjugate the deep-focus effects of *Citizen Kane* with acrobatic camera movements. . . . The *découpage* [breakdown of the sequence into shots] of *Touch of Evil* is truly vertiginous; the velocity of characters who are always in motion within the frame is superimposed on that of the editing, which is always linked with movement.

Despite the accuracy of this description and his just use of the word "diabolical," Bazin was curiously averse to seeing this method as a form of expressionism and hence stranger than life, insisting instead that it was chiefly an advance in film "realism." Naremore rightly interprets Welles's achievement as a *heightening* of reality.

> The peculiar exaggeration of perspective in *Kane* is equivalent to effects one sees everywhere in German expressionist cinema, where sets are usually built in tunnel-like designs. Toland's wide-angle photography is therefore made to contribute to the horror-movie feeling of the film . . . space becomes oppressive, demonic; ceilings are unnaturally low as if they were about to squash the characters—or, conversely, at Xanadu rooms become so large that people shrink, comically yet terrifyingly dwarfed by their possessions. . . . Again and again Welles uses deep focus not as a realistic mode of perception but as a way of suggesting a conflict between the characters' instinctual needs and the social and material world that determines their fate. He has continued this practice, fantastically exaggerating space in his later films . . . making exaggeration a key feature of his style.

Naremore puts well what I believe must be self-evident to anyone who has looked at films less pedantically than Bazin.

If, by emphasizing distinctions between montage and decoupage, Bazin moved other formalist critics to examine their views on the role played by process in cinema art, this is as far as his "influence" should safely go. The mutual interaction of constructive elements—this was the territory in which his definitions were useful. When he deserted

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that territory for the crucial questions of what Welles's films were all about, he trailed a vocabulary of the absurd. In a glib page or two of this "biofilmography" (his term), he pursued a hunch that the driving theme of Welles's cinema was his experience of childhood, because the career of Kane was in many ways the character's revenge on his childhood—and because snow happens to figure notably both in *Kane* and in *Ambersons*. Unable to justify this hunch in other of Welles's films, Bazin lamely abandoned the pursuit. With the language of physical science he was no more deft than with that of psychoanalysis. Of *Kane* and *Ambersons* he wrote,

> these two works constitute a vast aesthetic land mass whose geology and relief justify simultaneous study. [Once past] the first level of significance . . . one soon reaches, beneath these social deposits, the crystalline mass of moral significance.

Whoever first said that any Frenchman writes perfect prose because the language is so logical it is impossible to write imperfectly with it should be forced to read this passage aloud to himself every day, together with the blancmange of Cocteau, which I shall expose further on. Bazin's piece is, incidentally, loaded with mis- and incomplete information (about films, history, literature) that the translator was obliged to correct in footnotes. Furthermore, Bazin had a habit of disputing opinions allegedly in the air, which, since he didn't bother to identify them, left him arguing in a void. A young generation of French critics, he asserted, was "right to prefer Welles's Macbeth, torn between Heaven and Hell, to Olivier's Freudian Hamlet." A Freudian Hamlet seems to be inadmissible to him, but not a Freudian Kane! And why should one have to choose between these interpretations? Could Bazin not conceive of anyone, faced with such instances, crying a plague on both houses?

Clearly, in view of the drivel he wrote thereafter to characterize the Welles number, Bazin was radically unequipped, like so many Frenchmen, to make distinctions about Shakespeare. Determined as film Boswells usually are never to confess that their Johnson has fraudulent moments, he extrapolates *Macbeth* in a rush of words worth quoting because, though no sensible lay filmgoer I ever met thinks the film was anything but a gross embarrassment, those who have been intimidated (perhaps that's what Bogdanovich meant by "influential") by Bazin (among them Naremore) have evidently taken this passage seriously, without ever a pinch of salt among them:

> those barbarous Scots, dressed in animal skins . . . those strange settings trickling with water, shrouded in mists which obscure a sky in which the existence of stars is inconceivable, literally form a prehistoric universe—not that of our ancestors, the Gauls or the Celts, but a prehistory of the conscience at the birth of time and sin, when sky and earth, water and fire, good and evil, still aren't distinctly separate.

The editors at Harper and Row must have had misgivings about the slightness, if about nothing else, of Bazin's discourse. To justify the price of their publication they included some of the most badly printed stills I have noted in a film book; an introductory survey of Welles, to date, by François Truffaut; and a nauseatingly frivolous vignette, called a "Profile," by Jean Cocteau. Truffaut's foreword is partly intended to confirm the mystique of Bazin's authority. From time to time Truffaut obediently pauses to agree with Bazin on such and such a point. On the whole, in his sketchy way, he does far better than Bazin; at least when he mentions an "influence from" or an "influence upon" a Welles film he specifies the work he has in mind. And some of his passing judgments are astute—for example, his explanation of Welles's failure to authenticate *The Trial* in the spirit of Kafka:

> Welles, who is so much at ease filming power, pride and dominion, maybe isn't equipped to show their opposites: weakness, humility, submission. Since his adolescence, his corpulence and size have naturally led him to play kings. One almost never sees Orson Welles eat or drive a car. . . . One often sees him stand up but never sees him sit down.

Such an observation is quite as valuable as fifty pages on the intricacies of decoupage.

As for M. Cocteau: on his encounter with Welles at Venice in 1948, when *Macbeth* was being shown to Festival buffs, he wrote a

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footnote recalling a previous meeting with the American prodigy. His first sentence, which has at least the virtue of forthrightness, makes it clear that this profile will be more visibly that of Cocteau than of Welles. "I met Orson Welles in 1936 at the end of my world tour." All we then learn about Welles is what Cocteau said in answer to ruminations from Welles that he doesn't quote. *Macbeth* he comments on with such evasive gush as effectually to conceal anything so vulgar as a judgment. One finally wonders if he ever met Welles at all, for his rhetorical embodiment of the man is in the lackey tradition of French apologetics: the art critic who is paid by a painter to write a flyer for his opening and can turn out stuff of this kind without seeing the canvases he is extolling.

Orson Welles is a kind of giant with the look of a child, a tree filled with birds and shadow, a dog that has broken its chain and lies down in the flower beds, an active idler, a wise madman, an island surrounded by people, a pupil asleep in class, a strategist who pretends to be drunk when he wants to be left in peace.

What this needed halfway through was Woody Allen's interjection, "You can stop me any time!"

Mr. Naremore's 1978 book is indispensable for the solemn student of cinema: virtually a shot-by-shot narrative of the Welles oeuvre, which supplements but does not replace Charles Higham's excellent study, *The Films of Orson Welles* (1970). Naremore is of course the beneficiary of Higham as of other writers on Welles (sometimes he seems a handmaiden of Bazin), but the additional information he provides is copious; especially welcome are his reports on later unfinished projects (was there ever an artist with so many incomplete works in his trunk, or wherever they are?). Naremore has been assiduous—and I should say fortunate—in procuring the stills with which he has illustrated his expositions, and the Oxford University Press has done a splendid job placing them, in reduced format, precisely where they are needed in the text. (This is altogether an attractive example of bookmaking.) Unlike most authors of books on film directors, Mr.

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Naremore writes well: his literary allusions are sophisticated, his research has obviously been indefatigable, his eye for film composition and structure is impeccable. His book has everything except the personality that transcends scholarship.

One is left confused in retrospect because Naremore has failed to subordinate the data of his multilevel approach to a selective point of view. He appears to have fallen for that English department compulsion to say everything and say it twice over and, like Bazin and several others, never suggest that any single work in the artist's canon is considerably less valuable than another. *Suggest* you may, but you must never *conclude!* Even if you begin a review by reducing the premises of a film to absurdity, you then cancel the disparagement with fulsome praise of another order, which is in turn canceled by your initial deprecations—a frankly insane practice that no academic sponsor seems inclined to reform. (Naremore's put-down of *The Lady from Shanghai* is fairly representative, a sustained exercise in conditioned ambivalence.) His desperate effort to wring sense or beauty from *Macbeth* is in a line of descent from Bazin, except that he wastes his time worrying the question of whether Welles is truly "liberal" because his *Macbeth* is so crammed with primitive, demonic elements and with the hypnosis of power. This rather begs the question of the original *Macbeth*, does it not? "In the filmed version . . . Welles is trying to show that the line between barbarous ambition and a civilised order is very thin, and that constraints are needed to hold the will in check." I don't for a minute believe that Welles had any such pedagogic intention. Few critics ever have the wit, or the backbone, to acknowledge that crouched in Orson Welles, as in a hundred other film directors, there is a mindless child who simply likes to play with dramatic and pictorial effects. Welles is a great moviemaker; he is also given to catastrophic lapses of taste. I have a feeling that privately Naremore knows this, but he is in thrall to academic sponsors who would rather see a critic dead than hear him pronounce emphatically, "This film is just outrageously silly!"

The Magic World of Orson Welles (that title might better have been submitted to exhaustive debate) is for the reference shelf—as I said, indispensable. What is wanting to grace it as literature is a clear personal conviction about Welles that would illuminate and control the exhaustive discussions of technique and the to-and-fro cautions over value judgments. Charles Higham had such a conviction, and his consistent support of it makes his book memorable over and above its information: the conviction that Orson Welles's impatient disclaimers of films he didn't himself edit, his abandonment of enterprises when *he* is abandoned by producers, his feverish escape to another project with the present one, or several, incomplete, his growing collection of unstarted or unfinished masterpieces—that all these strategies, justified or not in fact, are analogical with Welles's lust for life and his desperate reluctance to admit its diminution, to hasten anything to its end, to see "Rosebud" confined to the flames, to hear the chimes at midnight—in short, a pervasive and crucial fear of death.

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